movement in STONE

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Mathuram Bhoothalingam

MOVEMENT IN STONE

(a study of some Chola temples)

by

MATHURAM BHOOTHALINGAM

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Note :

Several Indian names, words and expressions are freely used in the text. Most of them are Sanskrit or of Sanskrit origin. Generally they are explained whenever they are first used. Nevertheless, as an additional help to the reader, these explanations are briefly repeated in the glossary at the end of the book.

In rendering these names and words in the Roman script, common usage has been followed, except that long vowels are indicated by an accent mark(′). On balance, I have not thought it worthwhile to burden the lay reader by using the complicated phonetic symbols conventionally accepted by scholars. Even without them, a fair approximation to the right pronunciation can be obtained by carefully following the mark indicating long vowels.

To

Kitchie and Ambujam

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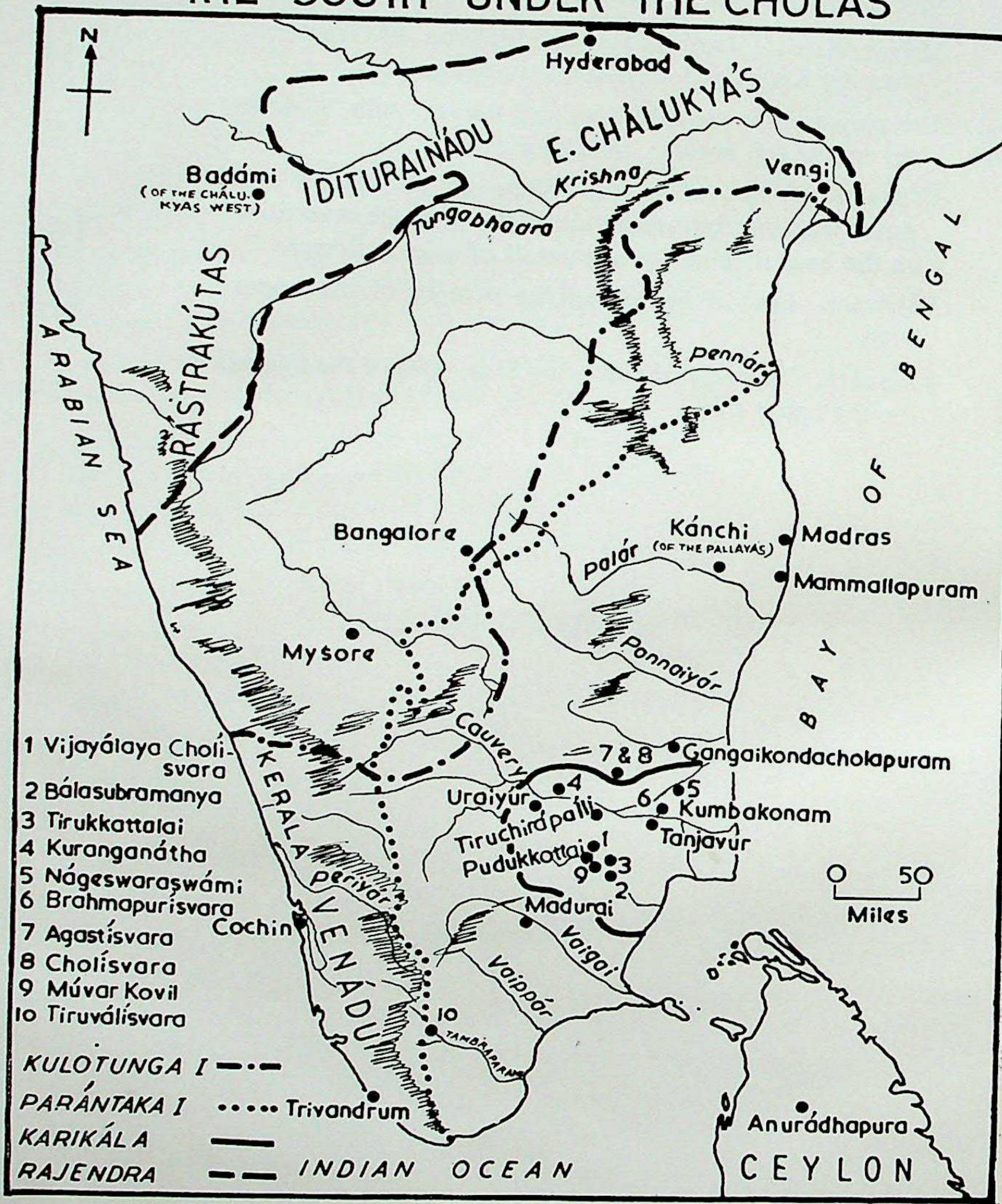
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IDITURAINÁDU
Badámi
(OF THE CHÁLUKYAS WEST)
Krishna
Vengi
Tungabhadra
RÁSTRAKÚTAS
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
Pennár
Bangalore
Kánchi
(OF THE PALLAVAS)
Madras
Palár
Mammallapuram
Mysore
Pannaiyár
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PARÁNTAKA I
KARIKÁLA
RAJENDRA

INTRODUCTION

Hindu art is like a pictorial script which expresses the subtle thought of its mythology and philosophy. Idealistic and symbolic, it exudes a deep sense of mysticism. The solid rock is made to live and give the impression that nothing is static. Ideas of time and space are woven into rock which seems to grow and expand with dynamic energy. An illusion of countless universes is created by the plastic moulding of mere rock.

The Hindu artist regards man in his spiritual, intellectual and physical attributes only as the microcosm in the macrocosm. He lets his mind wander over the tales of gods and goddesses, the cosmic giant (Purusha) or the mighty demons. His subjects are classical themes, the passive and active force in the Absolute, the World Preserver (Vishnu) in his many aspects, and the gods of Indra's heaven; in fact, everything from the creation and destruction of the universe to the birth and death of human beings the eternal truths are ground in stone. The range and expanse is so great that the sculpture seems to give a glimpse of eternity, and for a time we forget life's meaningless toil.

In Hindu mythology the evolution and dissolution of the universe is conceived in terms of an unending cycle of progress, disintegration and final end. And art reflects the human endeavour for perfection within this circle of expanding and shrinking universe. In expressing with simplicity and directness pure devotion and self surrender, Hindu art is unique. Possessed of aesthetic sensibility, one cannot but appreciate the technical skill and imaginative power with which these sculptures are moulded.

Rich in personification of rivers, mountains, sun, moon, stars and animals, subtle and bold figures emerge out of rock. They resemble woven tapestry and reveal power, joy, beatitude, tenderness and pathos. They evoke a feeling of wonder as well as of illusion. In the meditative sleep of Vishnu, the cosmic man on the expanse of the limitless ocean, and the power of the flaming lingam, the world of gods and sages is revealed to us in a series of carved pictures.

It is believed by experts that the collective unconscious is made up of a series of images similar to mythological themes. If that is so, Hindu art is most successful in attempting to integrate the conscious and the unconscious through its mythological images. The child god Krishna, wise old men like Vyása or Vasishta, the hero as Ráma, the serpent as Nágas and so on, the hidden soul of man is depicted in all its glory, delight and triumph over evil.

The Absolute is regarded as something abstract which pervades the entire cosmos. This Brahman or Supreme is formless and invisible, yet breathes and animates all life. In spite of this concept the ancient seers saw nothing incongruous in personifying the Absolute in various forms, both antagonistic and sympathetic. Naturally, the Absolute itself cannot be represented but forms symbolic of the various energies of cosmic life could be so moulded that they stir the inner spirit.

The personification of the Absolute in its three aspects of destruction, preservation and creation are the three gods, Siva, Vishnu and Brahma. Their qualities and energies counter balance each other to create a state of cosmic harmony. The common form in which Siva is worshipped is the phallic sign—the lingam—the symbol of male creative energy. This is fixed to a round base that is called the yoni, the female counterpart. Together is represented the creative union which sustains the Universe. The lingam is the immovable fixed symbol of creative energy. Siva is the essence of the dynamic, the destroying, the evolving, the burning and also the supreme static repose of the eternal being. Siva is also depicted as the yogi, the teacher and the mendicant. In his incarnation as Natarája, Siva is the master of dancing. The essential significance of the Siva dance is the idea of rhythmic motion. Its goal is to release humanity from the illusion that is life. Siva is said to have danced the famous Natarája dance at Chidambaram—signifying the mind as the centre of the Universe. This aspect of Siva appeals universally to philosophers, saints and artists.

Párvati is the consort of Siva. Siva and Párvati are the archetypal parents, the father and mother of the world, and are worshipped in their cosmic union. Siva-Sakti are the first revelation of the Absolute, the male being the personification of the aspect which we know as eternity and the female, the active energy —Sakti—the dynamics of time. The goddess is the yoni, the mother of the Universe. She has her counterpart in every woman.

Ganesa, the elephant-headed god and Kumara or Subramanya as he is known in the South are the sons of Siva and Párvati. Siva and Párvati, the world parents and the two sons are often shown in a group.

Ganesa the elephant-headed god of wisdom is the general of Siva's army of ganas (demi-gods). The elephant head is the symbol of sagacity. He is believed to bring good luck to those who worship him first before undertaking any task. He is greatly honoured as one who removes all obstacles.

Kumara is conceived as a young god, handsome and warlike. He is the commander-in-chief of Indra—king of the heavens.

Vishnu, the second of the three aspects of the Absolute, reclines in slumber on the unchanging waters absorbed in the dream of the universe inside him. Vishnu has a thousand and eight names to indicate his various incarnations. The main are ten, the fish, the tortoise, the boar, the man lion, the dwarf, Parasuráma, Ráma, Krishna, Balaráma and Kalki. The various myths connected with these incarnations are deeply absorbing. Vishnu took these forms from time to time to destroy the wicked and restore peace and harmony to the world. His benevolence is so all embracing that even demons may receive salvation through his grace. Vishnu reclining on the serpent in the sea of eternity has four arms. He holds the discus and the conch. The conch denotes the sound that echoes through space. The discus or Chakra symbolises the mind or the first thought of the supreme. The other two arms represent salvation and the bestowal of grace.

Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, came out of the churning of the Milky ocean, the cosmic sea of immortality. She is usually shown at the foot of the reclining Vishnu. She is Vishnu's creative symbol, the mother of life, giver of wealth and happiness. Vishnu is meaning, she, the utterance. Vishnu is righteousness, she, devotion. Sri or Lakshmi is earth and Vishnu, its supporter. The lotus is her symbol.

From the navel of the sleeping god sprouts a lotus and in it is Brahma, the Creator, the third of the Trinity. He is wisdom incarnate. Seated on the golden lotus, Brahma meditates. In full control of the powers of the universe, he creates. From the mind of Brahma as he sits in deep concentration are born the seven sages, the sub-creators or Prajápatis, and the fourteen Manus or kings of the earth. Out of the lotus of Brahma rise the mountains. On the underside of the petals live the demons and the centre of the flower is the great continent of which India, Jambúdvípa, is a part, and is surrounded by four oceans. Brahma composed the Vedas and later revealed it to mankind. We see in its freshness the first movements of man's mind, the beginning of thought. Nature pervades the vedic religion of India.

Sarasvati is Brahma's consort. She is the goddess of speech, learning, and the fine arts. The lute, or vína, is her symbol.

The goddess Durgá is absolute energy, the life giving force of the universe. She comes out of the combined energy of Vishnu, Siva and the other gods to destroy the demon, Mahisha. She is the "fairest maiden of the three towns" (Tripura-sundari), the primal female. She is life and energy in various forms. She is also often depicted as gruesome, dancing on the prostrate body of her lord, Siva. She is the symbol of the power that creates and destroys, an important aspect of the consort of Siva.

In vedic times the elements were personified as gods. The Vedas are full of songs in their praise. Indra is the warrior god, weilding the mighty power of thunder and lightning. His weapon is the thunderbolt and his most notable exploit is the slaying of the demon Vritra who hides away Indra's cloud cattle. In later Hinduism, he becomes the king of Heaven. He is very much like the Teutonic Thor. Indra is sculptured as rotund, hard drinking and jovial.

Varuna is the lord of the cosmic order and has control of the waters. He is the supreme vedic god. With deep insight he discerns truth from falsehood and inflicts punishment on those who go off the path of Rta or the vedic law of order. Later he becomes just the god of the waters.

Agni is the fire god, who carries the prayers of men to the gods through the sacrificial fire. Hence he is the divine counterpart of the earthly priests who conduct the sacrifice.

Soma is the heavenly ambrosia, the drink that gives the gods immortality. The moon is conceived of as the home of this nectar of the gods and named after it as Soma. In later mythology the moon is known as Chandra.

Súrya is the round red orb of the sun. He is the force of the gods, the life giving light of the universe. Hence he is the eye of the cosmic man or Purusha of the Vedas. He inspires and enlivens thought. He awakens the spirit of man. He is also known as Savitr or the reviver, the vivifier. The golden text of the Rig Veda is famous for the Savitr or Gayatri hymn.

Yama the god of death shines with great lustre. His palace is splendrous like burnished gold and in his world there is no sorrow, no age, no disease, no fatigue and no evil. In the Rig Veda the doctrine of the final end is resurrection or immortality.

The sun and the moon and seven other planets form the Navagriha that have deep influence in shaping the course of the life of man. Sculptures of the nine planets in a block are common in Southern temples. The apsaras are celestial maidens who rose out of the churning of the milky ocean. Voluptuous and alluring, they are the very embodiment of song and dance. They are the dancers of Indra's court.

The váhanas or vehicles of the gods represent the mood and character of each god on a lower plane. Thus the vehicle of Siva is a bull or Nandi, denoting virility, and that of the goddess Durgá is the lion showing warlike prowess and strength. Ganesa's is the mouse, the quiet remover of all obstacles.

Brahma rides the gander or Hamsa. It symbolises the divine essence, and freedom through spirituality, Brahma being the supreme sage.

The golden-winged eagle, Garuda is the váhana of Vishnu. He is the enemy of the serpent on whom Vishnu reclines. Vishnu sleeps on one and is carried by the other. It discloses the truth that the principal attribute of the first Superman is vitality.

Kubera the god of wealth appropriately mounts a man, showing how love of wealth enslaves man and keeps him in bondage.

The whole life of a Hindu is ruled by dharma or the duty of right action. A way of life was laid down which subjected all to severe discipline. The normal process of a Hindu's life consists in seeking happiness through the consummation of one's desire, but strictly within the limits of the practice of dharma. His goal however is liberation or Moksha. To these ends, a man's life span is divided into four compartments, the four stages or ashramas of life.

The first stage of life is brahmacharya or the student's life. Here the boy is required to live a life of strict continence in the teacher's house, acquiring knowledge, training and discipline. The second stage is the grihastya or the householder's life. The Hindu institution of marriage is made the basis for intellectual and moral intimacy. It is not so much a concession to human weakness as a means of spiritual growth. A householder performs his various duties with the moral support of his wife. After long years of devoted and faithful service to family and society, the husband and wife retire voluntarily and together. This third stage is vánaprastha. The fourth and the last stage of life is sanyása. The aim of the sanyásin or the man in the last stage is not merely to shake off the responsibilities of life but to attain a positive state of spiritual freedom. Having as an householder faced life tempted by riches or honour or elated by success and depressed by failure, he strives now to be free of all such matters. In the ancient world it was such men who renounced the world and sought salvation that endowed the Védas with philosophical ideas. These thinkers

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laid the foundations of Hindu philosophy and the art of India is pervaded by that philosophy. Everywhere sculptured in bold relief, again and again one will come across these characters, the thinker, the philosopher king, the saint, the mendicant, the warrior, the householder and the donor. And over and above these, removed but shining is the supreme example of the divine thinker, the yogi of yogis be he Siva, Vishnu or Brahma.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest stone monuments of India are from the Mauryan period, particularly from the reign of Asoka (B.C. 273 to 232). This great Emperor was converted to Buddhism and built thousands of stupas or mounds over the relics of Buddhist saints. From then on the history of Indian art has been carved in stone. The Mauryas developed to perfection the art of polishing hard stone, and during the reign of Asoka the craft of the stone cutter reached a high degree of perfection. The relief panels of Bhárhut and Sanchi, (some of it later than Asoka) are refined but striking and picturesque. They glow with the warmth of life, buzzling and cheerful, vivid portraits of the life and thought of the times.

From the first century A.D. the mighty foreign kings of Kabul who belonged to the Kushán clan of nomads dominated North India. Of them, the Emperor Kanishka who ruled between A.D .120 and 162 was the most powerful. He became an active but liberal Buddhist and to him is due the credit for having erected many remarkable Buddhist monuments. Kanishka, whose territory included Gándhára, brought to Indian sculpture the influence of Greek, Persian and Iranian art. In his time the forms of Greek art were applied with great success to Buddhist subjects. The drapery and lines were in Hellenistic modes. There were other schools of art which, though influenced by the Gándhára style, were more indigenous following the Buddhist art of Sanchi. Of these the elaborate art of Amarávati and Nágárjunakonda belonging to the age of Kanishka and his son Huvishka are most famous. The delight of the Amarávati bas-reliefs consists in the frank realism of the portrayal, the details like head dress, ornaments and movements being treated with unfailing grace. The best of Kushán art belonged to the first three centuries of the Christian Era.

The Buddhist monks dwelt in caves cut into the sides of rocky hills. The cells in which they resided were usually around a quadrangle. There were chapels or chaitya halls, refectories, and gateways or arches with imposing facades. This arrangement offered great scope to the sculptor and the architect. The beautiful Western India caves are the handiworks of gifted Buddhist monks. Many of them like Kárli (around the 1st century A.D.) are believed to be the work of the Sátaváhana Andhras whose empire extended up to modern Bhilsa in the North and who ruled the Deccan from coast to coast in the first centuries of the Christian Era. A part of Sánchi sculpture, particularly the gateways, is also attributed to them. Entering the cave at Kárli, the eye is held by the tiers of miniature monasteries that rise in terraces creating a picture of modern multi-storeys. The workmanship of the cells and balustrades is most delicate, while the figures of the donors in an attitude of rapturous worship have a quality of throbbing life.

During the reign of the Guptas, regarded as the golden age of Indian history (4th and 5th century A.D.), the aesthetics of art reached their zenith of perfection. It was during this period that caves evolved into separate monuments and the earliest stone temples came into being. In these temples the deity and its mythology determined the architectural forms. The exquisite temple at Deogarh (U.P.) is an example of Gupta excellence. The panels indicate the main deity of the temple as Vishnu. Although the Guptas were Hindus, they allowed Buddhist art to flourish side by side. Nor were they slow to take up its main motifs of style and decorative finish. In time Gupta art developed a freshness, a vitality and grace, in fact a distinctive style of its own, which posterity came to regard as classic.

Between the sixth and eighth centuries the spirit of Gupta art was kept alive by kings of various dynasties. Among them were the Vákátakas, the Ráshtrakútas and the Chálukyas of the West. The first two continued the art of Ajanta and Ellora, the last created a new centre of dynamic quality further South near and around Badámi. Evolved from the Gupta tradition, the supple grace of the goddesses of the caves of Badámi, long legged and slenderwaisted, show a poise and harmony distinct and individual.

The Ráshtrakútas who succeeded the Chálukyas in the West brought a certain grandeur and majesty in their conception of temple building and carving. The Trimúrti sculpture at Elephanta is sublime, its contours haughty and full of valour. So are the gigantic sculptures at Ellora. The temple of Kailása at Ellora is an example of visual phantasy. Hewn out of solid rock and resting on a caryatid of elephants, it is symbolic of the entire universe rising and moving towards eternity.

During the same period the Pallavas came into prominence in the South-east. Whether they were a northern race or not, they certainly were the natural heirs to the Sátaváhana tradition. The Sátaváhanas disappeared from history about this time and the Pallavas came into their own. Though Hindus, early Pallava sculptures were rock cut after the fashion of the Western India Buddhist caves. Later they spread southwards, were converted to saivism and finally settled at Kánchi. The shore temple and the exquisite rathas at Mamallapuram are evidence of Buddhist art forms and techniques adapted to Hindu temple towers. Miniature chapels or chaityas, domed cells and balustrades mounted over diminishing terraces formed the vimána or tower. The temple as we know it today was born. The lines and form of Pallava art bewitch the eyes. At the same time they display an austere grace born of saivite fervour. This gives the sculpture a quality of meditative beauty. The elongated limbs are moulded with tender plasticity.

While Dravidian civilisation was perhaps older than the Northern Aryan, there is no doubt that the culture of the Mauryas, the Kusháns and the Guptas almost completely replaced it. The Kusháns were Buddhists and the Guptas, Hindus. The South was deeply influenced by the art of both cultures. By the middle of the sixth century there were in the South two powerful dynasties, the Chálukyas of the West and the Pallavas of the East. For over two centuries they held sway over the south. The conflict between them was protracted and continued until the middle of the eighth century with varying fortunes. At one time a Chálukya king was slain at Kánchi, the capital of the

Pallavas. Thirty two years later, his son revenged the father's death by sacking Kánchi. As the Chálukya fortune ebbed, the Ráshtrakútas took over from them in the west of the Deccan. The Pallavas too in their turn declined towards the middle of the ninth century, giving way to the Cholas.

The Cholas of the South who were supposed to have been great kings in the pre-Christian times, had gone into obscurity since the early centuries of the Christian Era. But in the ninth century they revived under Vijayálaya, the first of a line of rulers known as the Imperial Cholas. Vijayálaya himself ruled his territory from Uraiyúr as a vassal of the Pallavas. The Mutturaiyárs too were Pallava vassals, enterprising chieftains who were in possession of Tanjavúr and the adjoining country. Being ambitious and wishing to aggrandise their dominion they stirred up the Southern Pándyas and Pallavas to constant strife. Whenever these two neighbouring dynasties were at war, the Mutturaiyárs sided with either party as it suited them. On one such occasion the Mutturaiyárs were on the side of the Pándya king Varaguna. Vijayálaya, fighting as the ally and vassal of the Pállavas inflicted a decisive defeat on them. Once victorious in battle, he shook off the Pallavas and set himself up as an independent ruler with his capital at Uraiyúr. He grew in power so rapidly that the declining Pallavas were no match for him nor were the Mutturaiyárs or other chieftains like the Irukkuvels of Kodumbalúr. The Pándya alone held out and bitter were the periodical struggles between the Cholas and the Pándyas.

The date of Vijayálaya's ascendency is about 850 A.D. and his son Áditya succeeded him about 870. Áditya's son Parántaka I reigned from 907 to 955 A.D. Thereafter until the accession of Rájarája in 985, Sundara Chola, Áditya II and Uttamachola shared the glory. Rájarája was the greatest of the Cholas of the Vijayálaya dynasty. His son Rajendra carried the glory of the empire beyond the seas and for a time held the Malay peninsula and the eastern archipelago. Rajendra's sons maintained the vast empire and his grandson Kullotunga I who reigned for fifty years retained the Empire at its widest except for the loss of Ceylon. With varying fortunes, the Cholas continued to be the most powerful dynasty in South India until the twelfth century, when decline set in. By the end of the thirteenth century, the rival Pándyan empire had risen to the height of its power and completely eclipsed the Cholas.

The Cholas, particularly Áditya I and Parántaka I, continued the tradition of temple building set by the Pallavas. The mode of scooping out live rock temples ceased with the early Pallavas, and small lovely temples, all of stone and perfectly proportioned, came into being instead. It is not possible to say definitely how many temples were erected by Áditya but inscriptions tell us that several temples were consecrated in Parántaka's reign and some of these might have been built during Áditya's reign.

It is during Parántaka's reign that Chola art began to flourish with great vitality. The great battle of Takkolam where he encountered his rival, the Ráshtrakúta Krishna III, made a deep impression on the Cholas in many ways. Krishna's invasion was naturally a blow to the power of the Cholas but at the same time it gave a spurt to their art. There seems to be no doubt that a number of craftsmen and artisans who were with the Ráshtrakúta camp stayed behind to enrich the art of the Cholas. The Cholas were devout Saivites and innumerable were the temples they built in honour of Siva, the stern ascetic as well as the benign saviour.

TEMPLE DESIGN

The main architectural feature of the Hindu temple is the sanctuary known as the vimána. Over the vimána is the spire or the sikhara. The topmost part of the sikhara is the stúpi or finial. Inside the vimána is a small dark cell known as the garbhagriha or womb-house. In this is housed the divine symbol, be it a lingam or a Vishnu. The doorway of this cell usually faces east so that the rays of the early morning sun may stream in and bathe the divine lingam in a flood of glory. In front of the doorway is a pillared hall or mandapa. Uniting the two is a vestibule or porch known as the ardhamandapa.

In the latter half of the seventh century, the temple began to assume its present form. A glorious era of temple building followed and superb creations were fashioned in stone or hewn out of rocks. Temple building became the duty, the pleasure and the pastime of kings.

In South India the temple was often enclosed in a quadrangle, a range of smaller shrines lining the walls facing inward. In time this set the normal pattern for the Hindu temple complex. Many Buddhist architectural features were adopted. For instance the Buddhist monastery, composed of cells and chapels or chaityas one above the other around a courtyard, seems to have suggested the idea of the pyramidal vimána. The chaityas, converted into miniature rectangular waggon-shaped tunnels, and the cells into domical roofs, were ranged along the ledges of the diminishing terraces. The domed top is known as the sikhara and the finial over it as the stúpi.

The craft guilds and the laws of silpa or masonry art set a standardised artistic and structural procedure which the entire temple building movement followed in its broad aspects. The guilds were maintained by a system of apprentices. These lived with their masters, served and worked for them. As time went on each specialised craft was handed down like family property from father to son. But the nature of building art made groups or guilds of masons move from site to site. At times they had to settle on a site for a generation or more depending on the magnitude of the construction on which they were engaged. In this manner every important architectural edifice developed an art centre or a local school and style of its own.

The silpa sástra or codes contained detailed instructions for construction. They were committed to memory by the artisan and usually the master mason recited the verses to his staff while at work. A work-shop language of complicated silpa conventions thus came into being. The workmen believed that it was impossible to fail if the codes were followed faithfully. Rigid conventionality is known to impair spontaneity and stifle the creative spirit. Yet we see a high level of originality in Indian art. There is no doubt that it was deep religious zeal that inspired the sculptor and mason. No names of master masons have been handed down. The temple was created not by one man but by several groups of masons, each a master in his own field. Detailed study and accurate measurement were done according to the silpa sástras. The materials were prepared in the quarry and assembled on the temple site. Often the masonry was first joined on the temple walls and the carver started work later. But generally the carving was done in the site of the quarry. Whatever the mode, the Hindu mason showed in his composition great eye for structure, line and shadow as also for mass form. The lotus base, the roll cornice and the pillars with capitals shaded with thick slabs or palagais as they are called, are some of the features used in Chola temples with great effect.

1. THE CHOLA STYLE

Most of the temples attributed to the Cholas during the ninth and tenth centuries before the accession of Rájarája are small ones built entirely of stone. Among these are the Sundareswara temple at Tirukkattalai, Vijayálaya Cholísvara at Melamalai, the three temples of Kodumbalúr and the Bálasubramanya temple of Kannanúr. To these could also be added the Nageswaraswámi at Kumbakonam, the twin temples of Agastísvara and Cholísvara at Kilaiyúr, the Kuranganátha at Srínivásanallúr, the Brahmapurísvara at Pullamangai and the Siva temple at Tiruválisvaram.

Built between the ninth and tenth centuries, these temples in the early Chola style are small but fine creations. They have absorbed the best in Pallava art which by then was on the decline. At the same time they are compositions imbued with a freshness of spirit which gives them their undisputed place in temple art. It seems clear that they were also inspired by the art of the Chálukyas and Ráshtrakútas. At Tirukkattalai, Kodumbalúr and Vijayálaya, the shape of the domical finial of the sikhara (dome) and that of the vimána (tower) is similar in contour to those of the temples of Pattadakkal near Badámi (Chálukyan). The Chola sculptures too often exhibit the Ráshtrakúta spirit for power and movement and the Chálukyan love for poetry in form.

Royal courts often vied with each other on the skill of their artists and craftsmen. At times a gift or an exchange of a master craftsman or sculptor could have been made as a proof of friendly diplomatic relations between rival dynasties. There seems to be little doubt that the flow of artistic talent between the Pallavas and Cholas on one side and the Chálukyas and Ráshtrakútas on the other side, took place in this manner.

The earliest Chola temples were all stone, a distinctive style known as Karráli. Later in the Chola age it became the practice to build the basement in stone and use brick for structures over it. The basement is moulded in the form of the inverted lotus and together with the walls cut into projections like the petals of a flower. The walls of the vimána are embedded with pilasters and have niches or bays topped by arches of fine frieze work. The niches contain some of the most beautiful sculptured figures in South India. The gods and goddesses in the bays are usually placed in a certain order. Dakshinámúrti is normally in the south wall and Brahma in the north wall. The structure of the pilaster, corbel, roll cornice and sikhara as well as the detailed work follow a standard Chola pattern. The upper storeys, though of brick, follow the style of the lower stone structure. In the group given here the Kuranganátha temple alone marks this transitional period between Pallava and Chola, i.e., the base of stone and the upper levels in brick. Vijayálaya Cholísvara was built in the reign of Vijayálaya, a fine example of the earlier age. Bálasubramanya and Sundareswara can be placed in the reign of Áditya I, his son. To Parántaka I (Vijayálaya's grandson) the great builder, can be attributed Nágeswara, Kuranganátha and Brahmapurísvara. It seems from the general style that the twin temples of Agastíswara and Cholísvara as well as the Siva temple of Tiruválísvara must have been completed just before the accession of Rájarája (985 A.D.). The inscriptions at Tiruválísvaram lead one to this view.

An inscription in the southern wall of Agastísvara temple indicates the reign of Áditya but one in Cholísvara points to the reign of Parántaka I. Since the Paluvettaraiyár chieftains of Kilappaluvúr were great friends of Parántaka I and Kilappaluvúr is only three miles from the twin temples, it is possible the latter inscription holds.

Áditya I died at Tondaimánád near modern Kálahasti. His son Parántaka I built a temple over his remains, naming the lingam consecrated in the temple, Ádityesvara. It is interesting to note that as late as the tenth century this Buddhist practice prevailed.

VIJAYÁLAYA CHOLÍSVARA

Perched elegantly on the eastern slope of Melamalai, (ten miles from Pudukkottai) is the lovely temple of Vijayálaya Cholísvara. It is the earliest of Chola temples. Driving along, one sees sparse vegetation and shingled rock. The scrub jungle is thick with thorny bushes, a tenuous growth that is impenetrable. This waste land with sheets of shallow water tanks has a beauty of its own. Water birds like fleets of black cormorants and white cattle egrets are in constant motion. The silence is broken only by the tuk tuk of the barbet and the melancholy whistle of the drongo shirke. Once on the side of the hill, the eye is enraptured by the Chola edifice. It is a beautiful monument, carefully dressed by skilled masons, with large blocks of stone that rest together without mortar.

An inscription records that the stone temple of Vijayálaya Cholísvara was originally built by Sembudi Ilangodi Araiyan, destroyed by lightning and reconstructed again by Tennavan Tamiladi Araiyan in the reign of Vijayálaya. The temple was named after the Chola king.

There are a few subshrines which were no doubt once enclosed in a huge courtyard. Some of these, in various stages of decay, still exude a natural grace.

The main temple stands on a strong double lotus base with walls running round the vimána and ardhamandapa that are embedded with elegant pilasters topped by palagais or stone planks. But with the exception of the dwarapálas, figures and portraits adorn only the upper terraces. The main shrine or garbagriha is circular, and is enclosed within a square hall that allows only a narrow passage for circumambulation. The ardhamandapa together with the vimána give the building its rectangular shape and symmetry. (P1. 1)

The flat roof of the ardhamandapa is supported in the interior by monolithic pillars crowned with bracket capitals. The

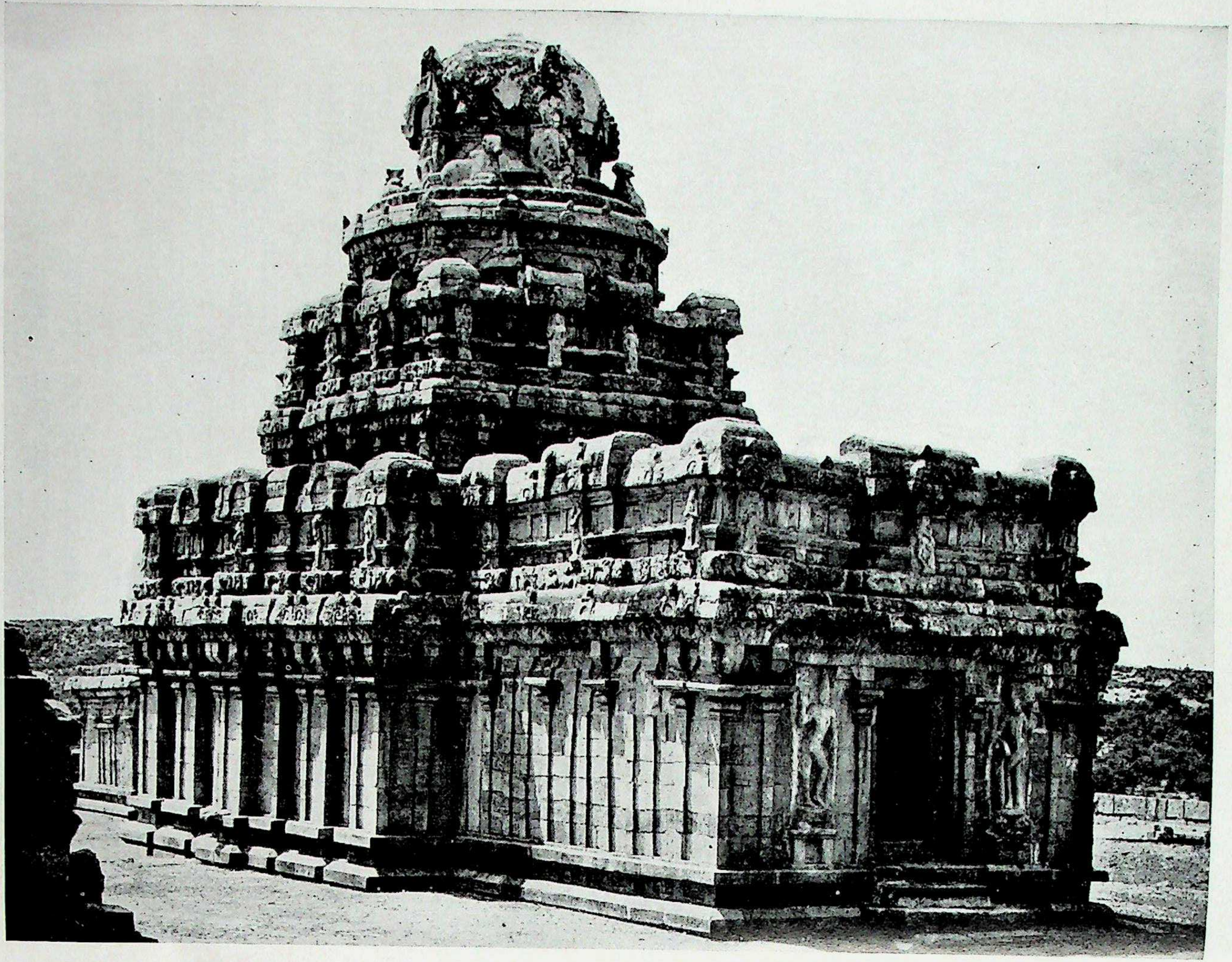

Plate 1 : Vijayálaya Cholísvara at Nárttamalai. The main temple.

gateway is guarded outside by two dwarapálas, each with one arm resting on the club and the other held out in a pose of surprise or vismaya. The legs are crossed. The expression of hauteur in their thick faces is typical of Chola sculpture. It reflects the pride and glory of their kings. Even the gods of the Chola have lordly bearing as if they were kings of the earth as well as heaven. (Pl. 2)

Over the pilasters and palagais and the cut-in typical angular corbels, is the curved roll cornice with its chaitya arches or kudus showing laughing faces. On every tier under and over the roll cornice are rows of frolicking ganas, gargoyles or yális, apsaras and gods. The first two tiers have broad parapet walls running over the edge. These are topped by domical cell-like roofs. (Pl. 3)

The parapets contain recesses which are illumined by apsaras, illustrating some of the most graceful poses of the Southern Bharata Nátya dance. The last tier is circular. On top of it adjoining the dome are great stone bulls or nandis. These have broad shoulders with rippling muscles. In between the bulls are four elaborate chaitya arches with niches containing the most superb portraits. One is Siva as Vínádhara, the holder of the lute, Vína. He wears a look of supreme serenity. Spiritual contemplation is the keynote of Hindu art. The Cholas in particular loved to portray Siva (Dakshinámúrti) as enthroned in the world's highest snow peak in the meditative spirit of the yogi or divine thinker. Another of these portraits reveals Siva in an altogether different mood. Here he is seen with Párvati in a tender mood caressingly tilting her chin with his right hand.

Unfortunately the hot sun and the hard wind beating upon them mercilessly for years and years have wrought havoc on the lovely sculptures. They appear rough and weather-beaten. Even so the entire effect of Vijayálaya Cholísvara from its moulded base to its terraced top is one of breath taking beauty. Modelled with loving care, graceful figures and rollicking elephants and ganas emerge continuously from the granite surface. The mischievous window faces are captivating. The nymphs or apsaras

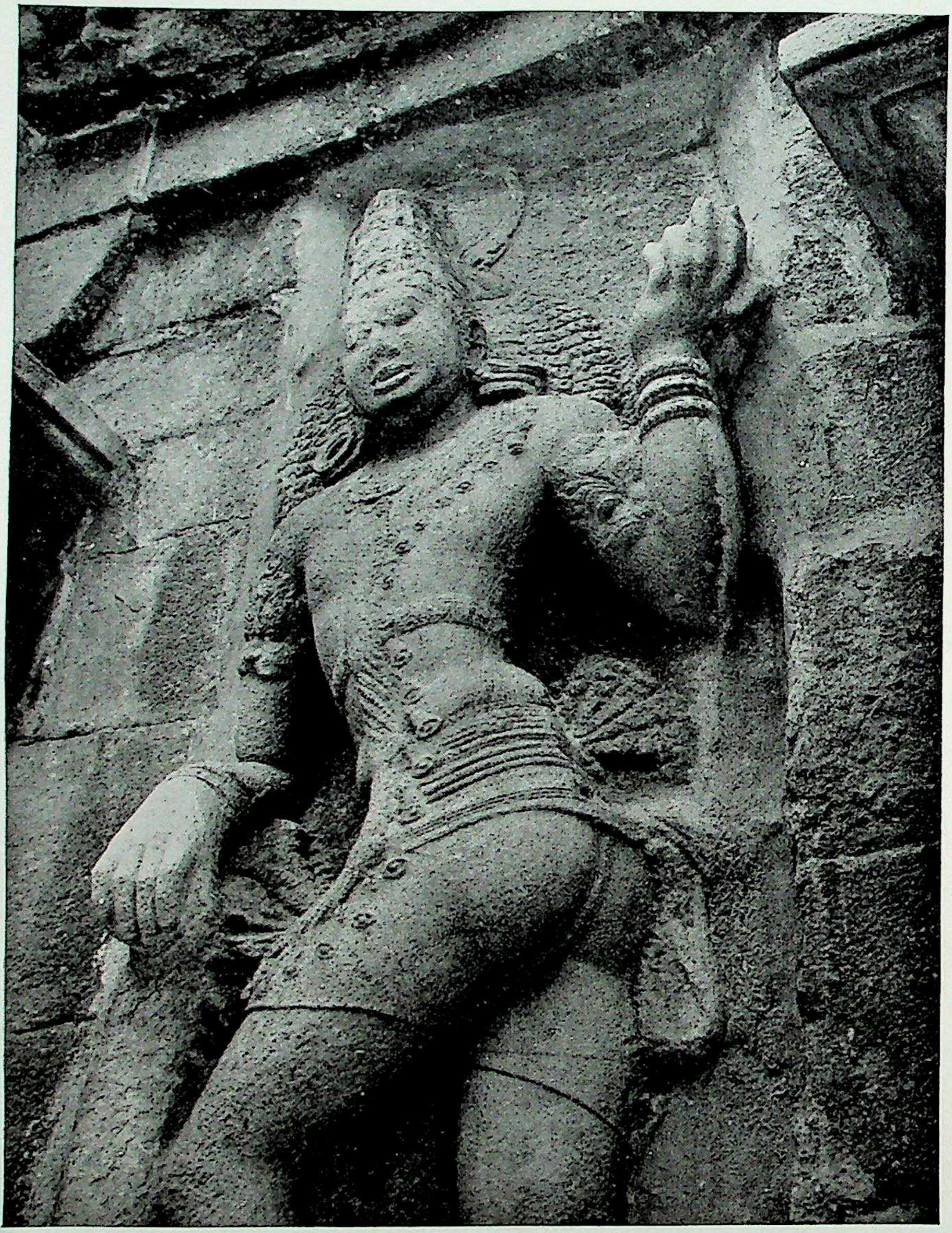

Plate 2 : Vijayálaya Cholísvara. The dwarapala or gate keeper.

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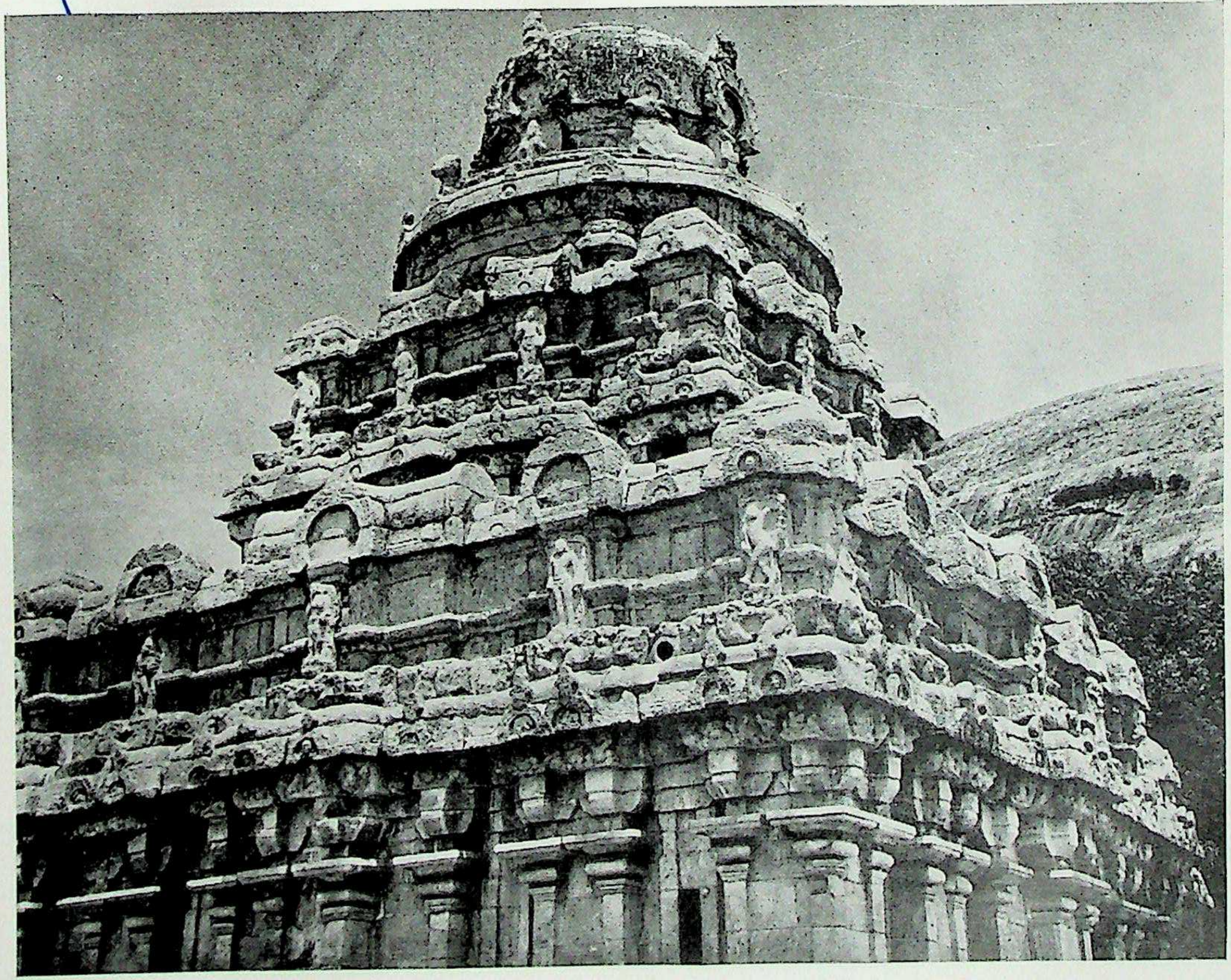

Plate 3 : Vijayálaya Cholísvara. A close view, showing the pilasters, the capital topped by the palagai, angular cut in corbels, the line of ganas under the roll cornice, the little chaitya windows and the goddesses on the parapet walls.

of the recesses have an alluring charm about them. Their graceful poses offer unending delight.

BÁLASUBRAMANYA

Kannanúr is seventeen miles from Pudukkottai. The Bálasubramanya temple is in a state of decay. The full text of the two inscriptions can no longer be deciphered as they have been mostly built over, but from what little can be seen, it is clear that the temple belongs to the period of Áditya I. Built entirely of stone, the otherwise plain walls of the vimána are embedded with elegant pilasters. These have the typical kalasam (round pot) like structure topped by a kumbham (capital) and a palagai or sunshade-like plank. Being half embedded enhances the slenderness of the pilasters. Under the roll cornice between the angular corbels runs a frieze of Siva's ganas (bacchalian figures) in joyous playfulness. The roll cornice itself is punctuated with little chaitya window faces bordered by beautiful scroll work. Over the roll cornice the parapet edging is lined with rows of playful elephants and yális (gargoyles). (Pl. 4)

A single-storeyed building, it has no pyramidal terraced vimána but the sikhara crowns the temple immediately over the parapet. The stones of the round dome are loose in their sockets and about to crumble down. Yet the Chola genius for composition sets off its elegance. At the gríva or neck of the dome are four niches beneath simple arches. Two of these have figures so weather beaten that they cannot be identified. On the parapet adjoining the dome are four elephants instead of the usual nandis. The old Tamil sangam literature mentions the elephant as one of the vehicles of the god, Subramanya. The sikhara is bell-shaped, has a beautiful curvature and is topped by an ornamental stone stupi of exquisite design. Less ornate in style, the very simplicity of the Bálasubramanya temple has a charm like that of a lovely maiden without ornaments. In the western wall is a fine posture of Dakshinámúrti, Siva in beatific contemplation.

Although the garbagriha and ardhamandapa making a graceful rectangle are early Chola structure, the mandapa itself is

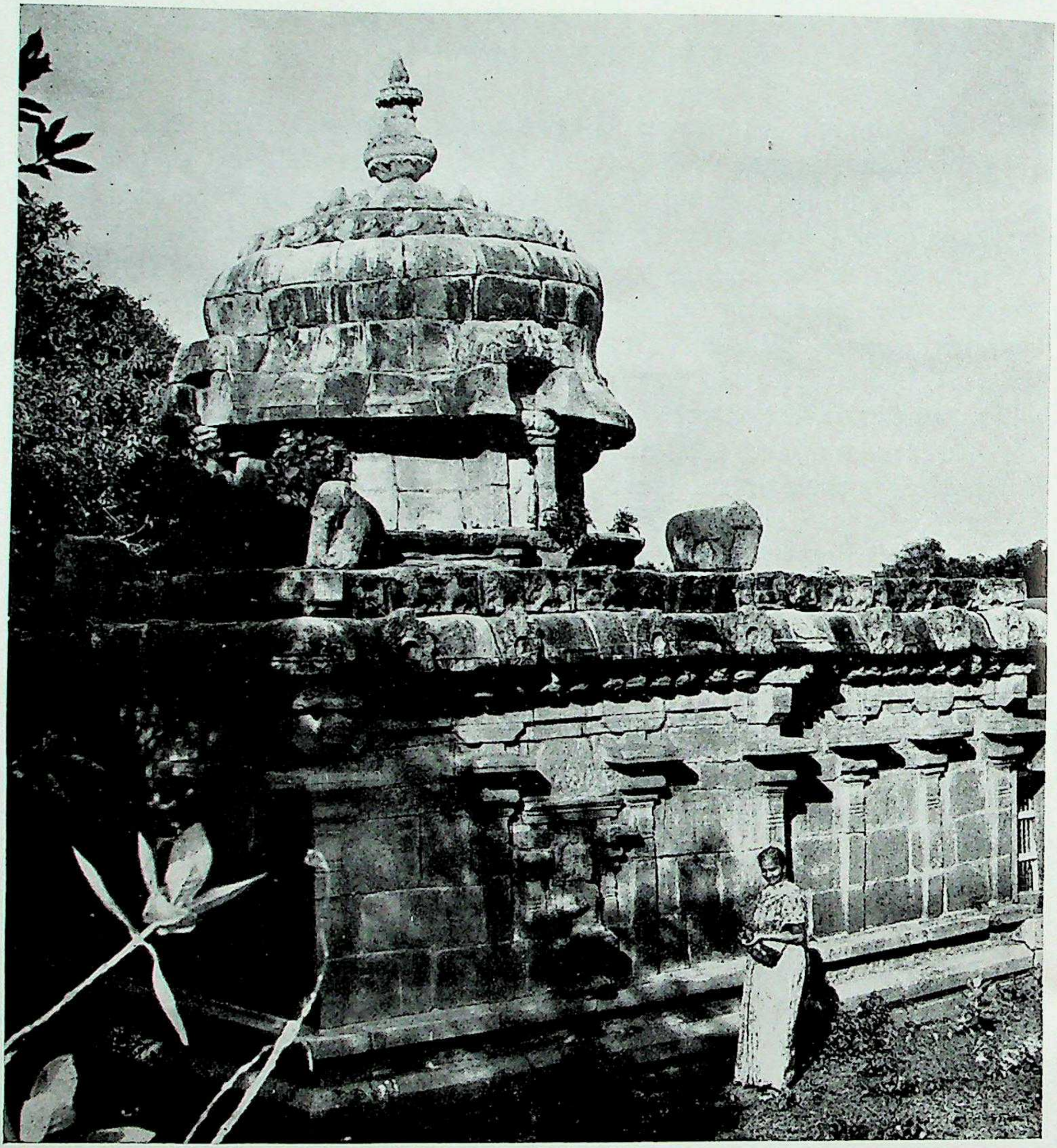

Plate 4 : Bálasubramnya at Kannanúr. Side view of the temple and sikhara. On the platform by the sikhara are elephants instead of nandis, an unusual feature. In a niche on the wall is a Dakshinámúrti.

later Pándya. It is supported by two rows of four pillars each. The figure of the temple deity, Bálasubramanya that was once housed in the garbagriha is now found outside. This is a standing figure showing the early Chola spirit of great strength and virility. Bála is young and this Subramanya certainly is a young god of great beauty.

SUNDARESWARA

Tirukkattalai is four miles from Pudukkottai. It is believed that Tirukkattalai is a corrupt form of Tiru (sacred) and Karráli (stone temple). The Siva temple of Sundareswara at Tirukkattalai is perfect in proportion and design. So graceful is its general appearance that but for the over-ornamentation of the vimána one could almost imagine oneself at Kodumbalúr. (Pl. 5)

As in Vijayálaya Cholísvara, the central shrine has seven sub-shrines around it against the walls of the main enclosure. There is a separate shrine for the goddess. The garbagriha and ardhamandapa have thick massive walls. Like the Bálasubramanya this too is a single-storeyed temple but has graded terraces right up to the sikhara. The embedded pilasters have fine scroll work and the niches on each of the walls are surmounted with semi-circular yáli frieze of great beauty. The rest of the detail, the corbels, the gana lines and chaitya window faces are exactly the same as in Bálasubramanya. Each niche on the wall has figures of great charm. They are Brahma, Tripurántaka (destroyer of the three towns) (Pl. 6) and Lingodbhava (Siva emerging from the lingam). The menacing dwarapálas at the ardhamandapa give another aspect of Chola style, that of strength and the deities of the sub-shrine, an impression of austere gravity.

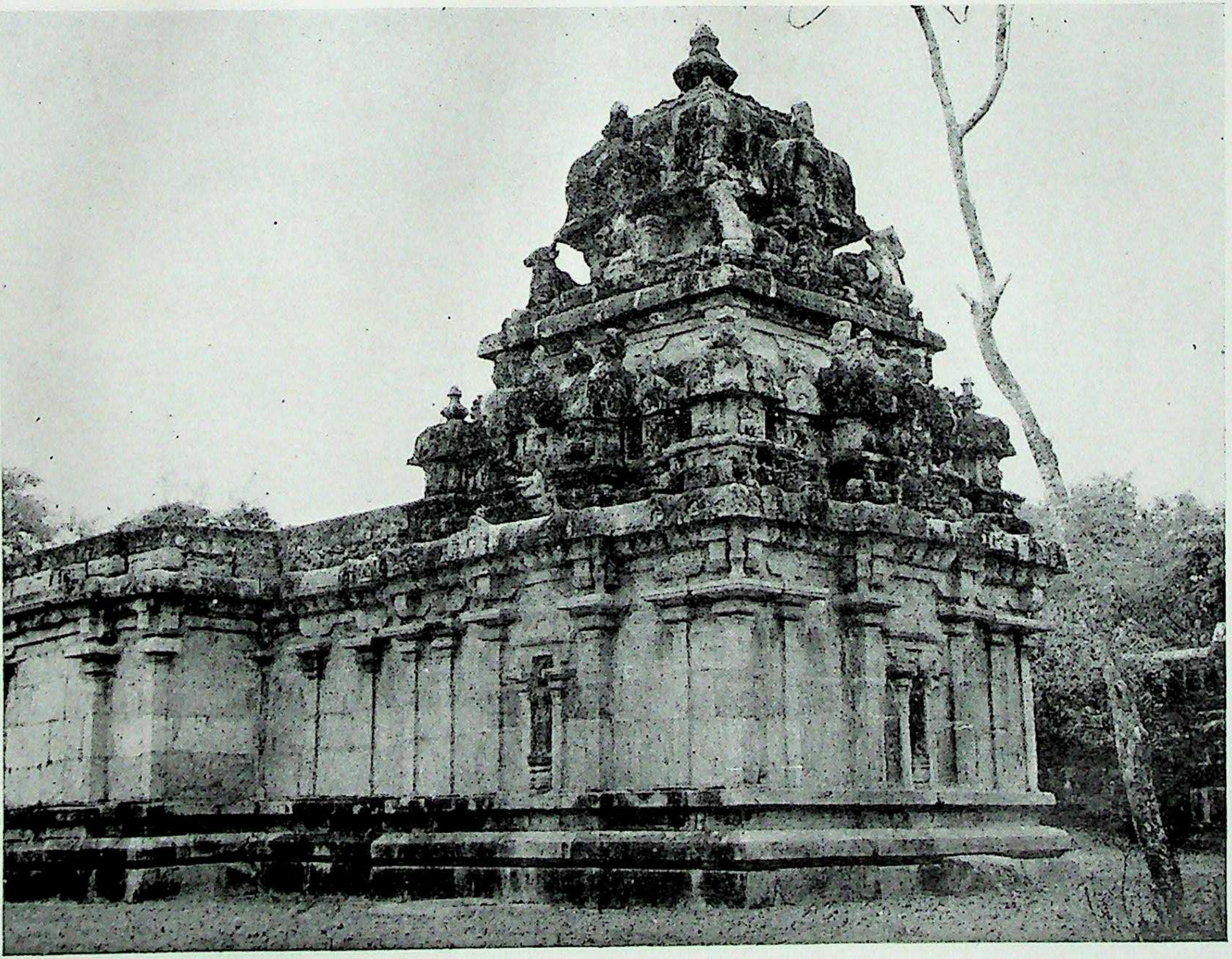

Plate 5 : Sundareswara at Tirukkattalai. The main temple.

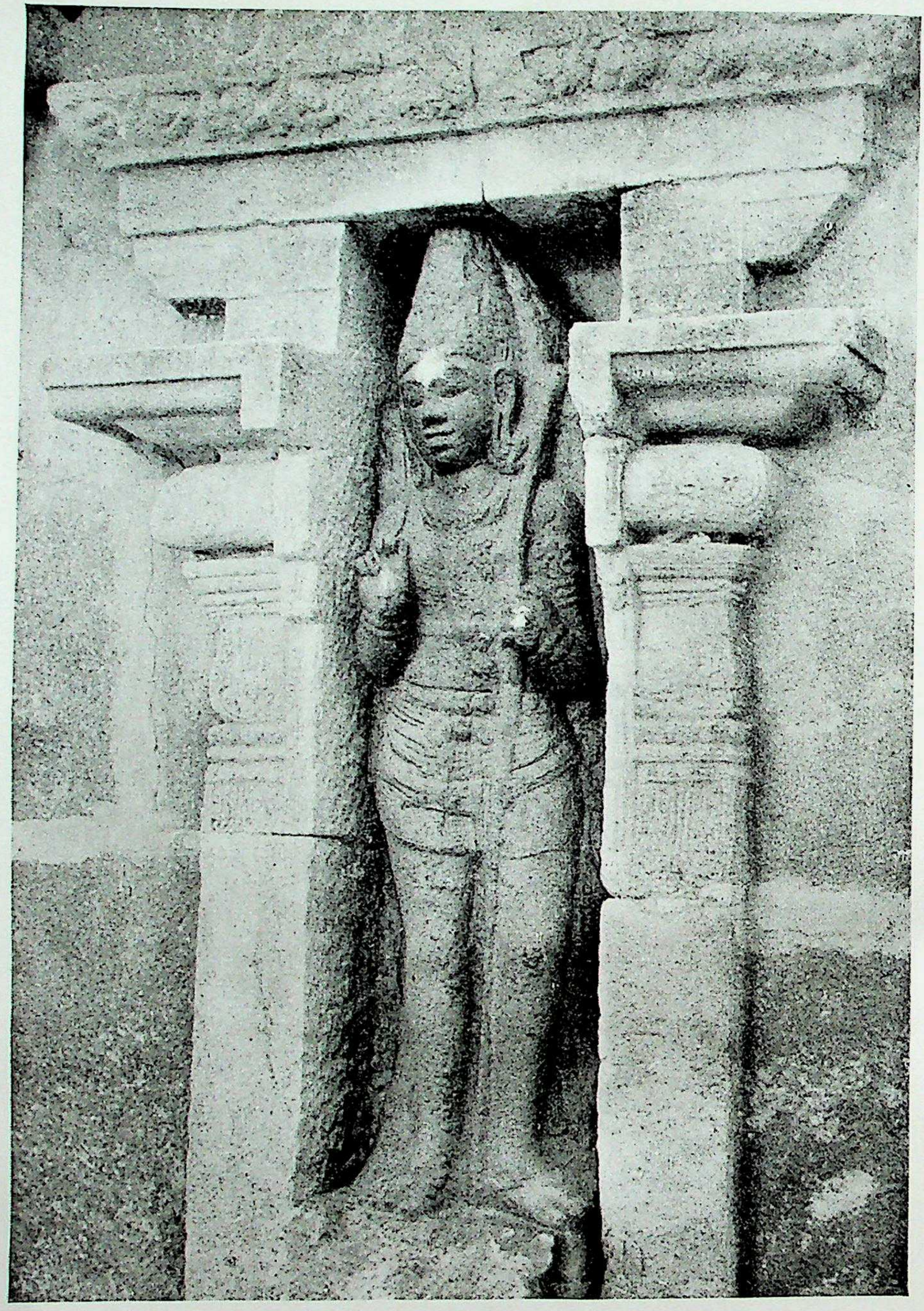

Plate 6 : Sundareswara. Tripurántaka, Siva with the bow about to destroy "the three towns".

KURANGANÁTHA

In the next phase of development this austere gravity gives place to a charming voluptuousness full of sensuous lines. The Kuranganátha and Nágeswaraswámi are two examples. The Kuranganátha temple at Srínivásanallúr is one of the finest examples of Chola architecture. The Tiruvalangádu plates state that Áditya I, son of Vijayálaya defeated the Pallava ruler, Aparájita. In the battle he flung himself on Aparájita who was on a huge elephant and slew him. Áditya, says another plate, built rows of tall stone temples on both sides of the Káveri, in honour of Siva to commemorate his victories. He had married a Pallava princess. His senior queen however was the daughter of the Ráshtrakúta king Krishna II. Many of the temples built in his reign were consecrated later, in Parántaka's time. At Kuranganátha and Nágeswara one meets Pallava grace and Ráshtrakúta majesty.

Driving along the green banks of the Káveri to Musiri, the wandering eye is gladdened by the sight of waving green paddy fields, the coconut palms and banana groves. Over the high banks, bending low and sweeping the water front are the fragrant ketaki flowers beloved of Siva. Here five miles from Musiri is the temple of Kuranganátha. It is a building of modest proportions. The rise of the vimána and the length of the ardhamandapa or portico is of excellent proportions. (Pl. 7). The entire composition displays a return to earlier Pallava simplicity. Strong pillars underpin the solid roof of the ardhamandapa. The lotus shaped abacus with the expanded palagai give these a striking effect.

The whole temple stands in a built-in pit. The moulded base, curved and shaped like an inverted lotus springs from this pit. The entire edifice appears to rise out of water like the spirit rising from the lake of the mind and soaring high to its heavenly abode. Inside the garbhagriha is the divine spark, the eternal spirit. The lotus of life, the vimána soars high, heavenwards.

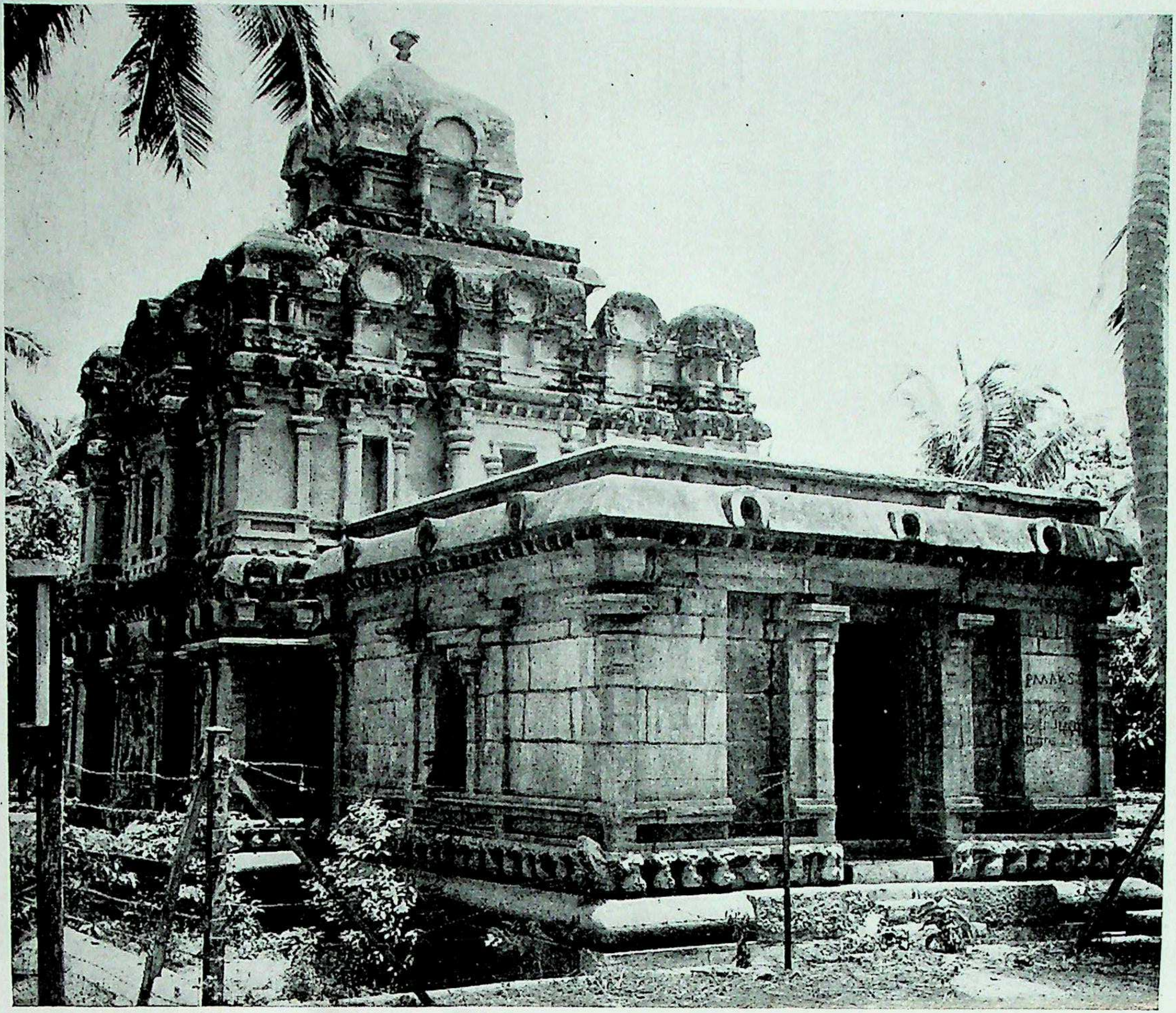

Plate 7 : Kuranganátha at Srínivásanallúr. The main temple rising from the pit.

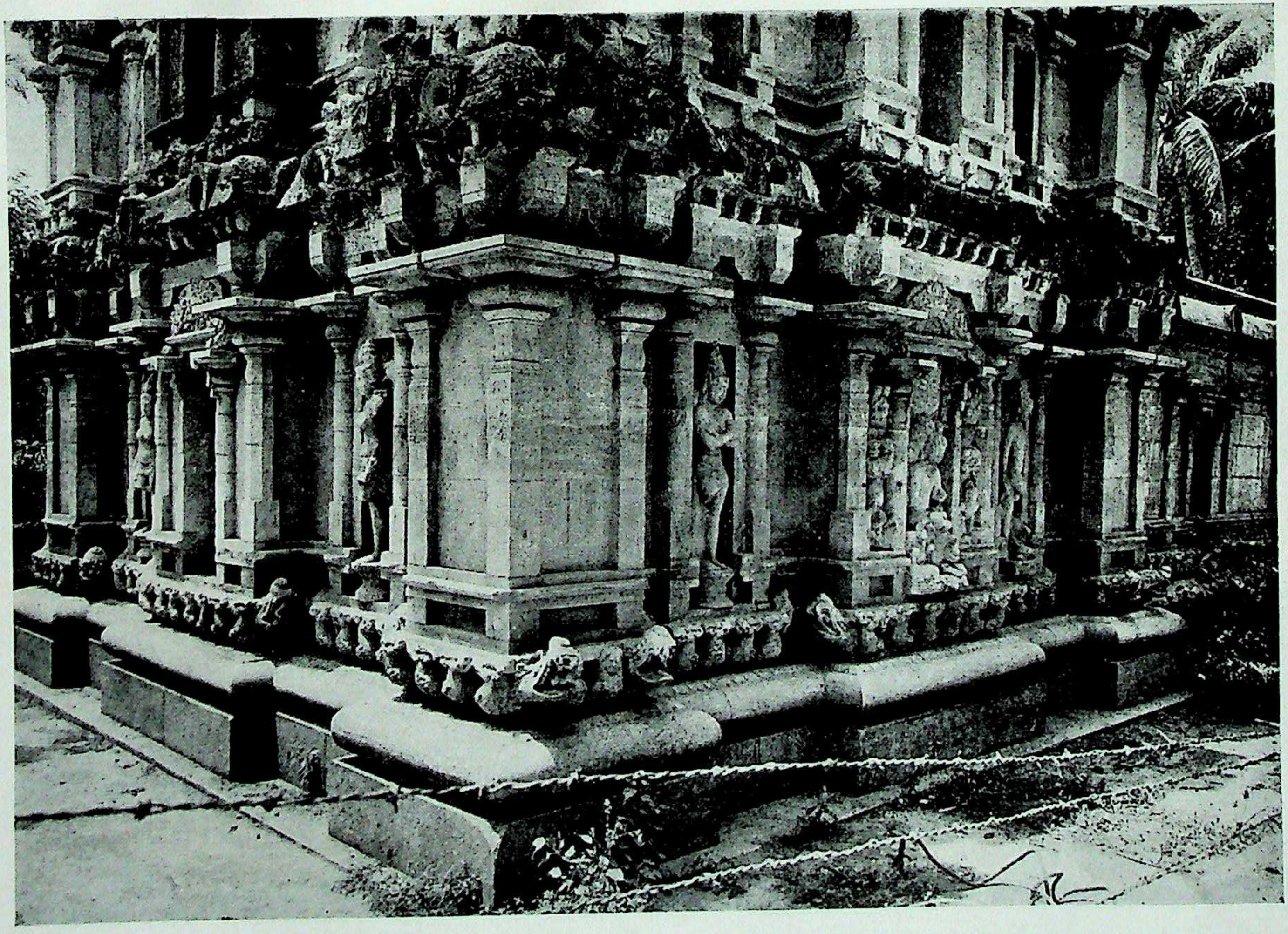

Plate 8 : Kuranganátha. The moulded base shaped liken an inverted lotus with a line of yali frieze running over it. Note the details of the pillars, their placement enclosing rich panels of carving.

Just over this massive double lotus base run a line of playful yális, gargolyes that add life to this poem on stone. (Pl. 8)

The walls of the ardhamandapa are plain but those of the vimána are cut into inversions and projections giving the effect of the petals of a lotus. The same style is followed in Nágeswaraswami, and the temple of Tiruválísvara. The pilasters embedded in the walls serve to form bays and these are adorned with beautiful almost life-size sculptures. Over the bays are arches with delicately carved frieze work. (Pl. 9 a & b).

The upper part of the temple is bricklaid. It follows the same structural pattern as the lower one but has no sculpture in the niches. The pilasters lend it a simple dignity. The curved cornices that are underpinned by corbels of angular profile have horse shoe chaitya windows of great beauty. The sikhara is four cornered and curvilinear with the same four niches, topped by chaitya arches. The bays of the lower vimána stand out with unmistakable distinction. In them are comely figures that are striking to behold.

In the bay on the south wall is Siva as Dakshinámúrti. Dakshina in Sanskrit means south, and here Siva as Dakshinámúrti faces south. He is in the yogásana or meditative pose. Over him is the peepal tree. Under his feet lie deer. There is tranquil repose on his face. His curly hair is of extraordinary beauty. Short curls, being unusual, were regarded as a sign of special celestial distinction. (Pl. 10).

Siva ganas (attendants) in amusing postures and in rounded profile fill the other tiers in the niche. Of particular note are the two acolytes posed in an attitude of prayer on either side. We are to meet them again at Brahmapurísvara. These give out the spirit of Chola saivite devotion, pure, austere and grave. On either side of this bay are two niches with standing sculptures. One of them is a youthful Siva, his right leg turned over to the left and resting on a gana. The powerful lines leave an impression of a figure arrested in movement.

In the west wall, the central niche is empty but is topped by a frieze of delicate carving. Perhaps this niche could have once

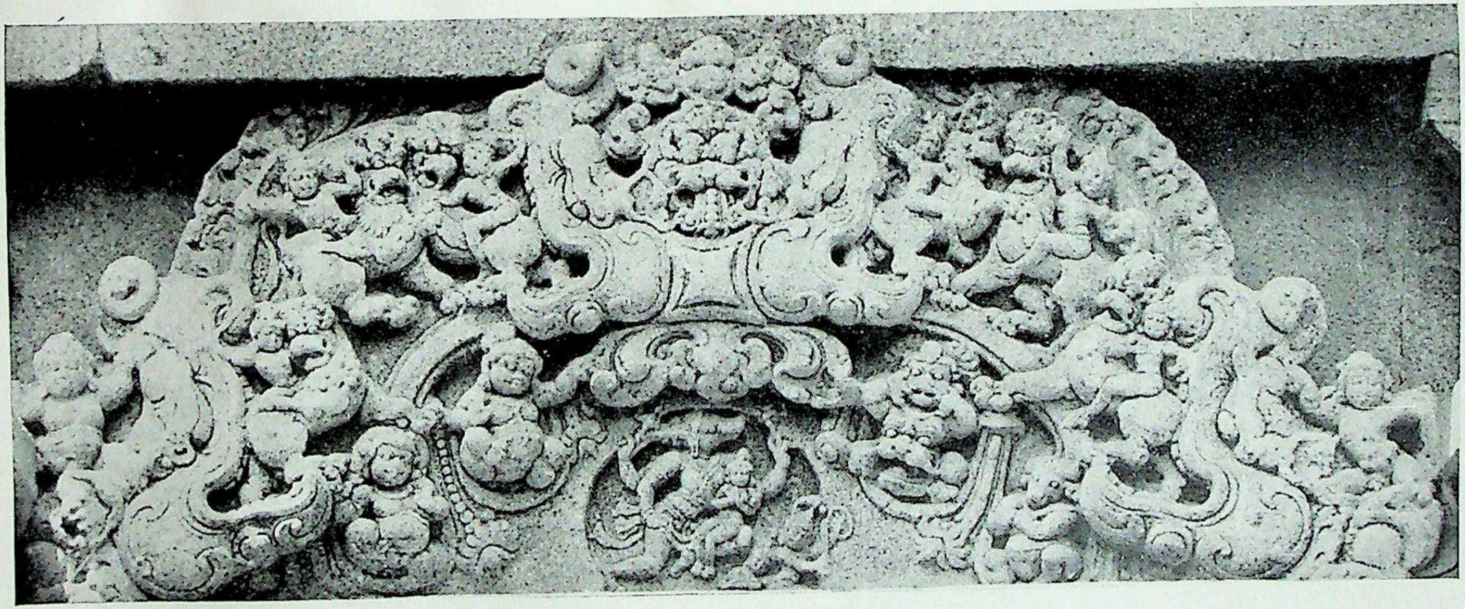

Plate 9a : Kuranganátha. An arch over a niche delicately carved with frieze work. The inset shows the boar incarnation of Vishnu rescuing the earth goddess.

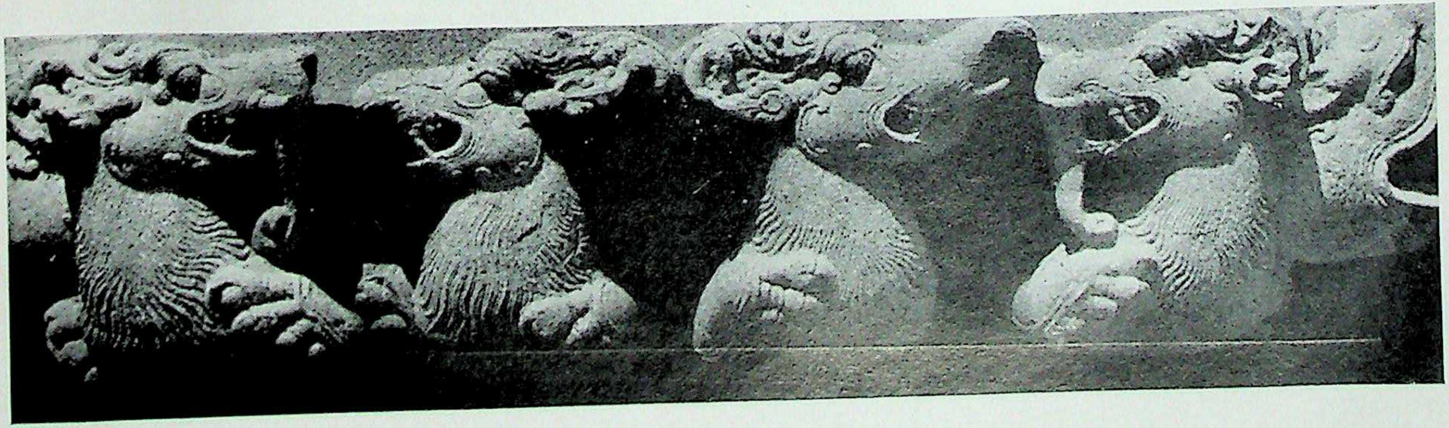

Plate 9b : The line of yális below the niche.

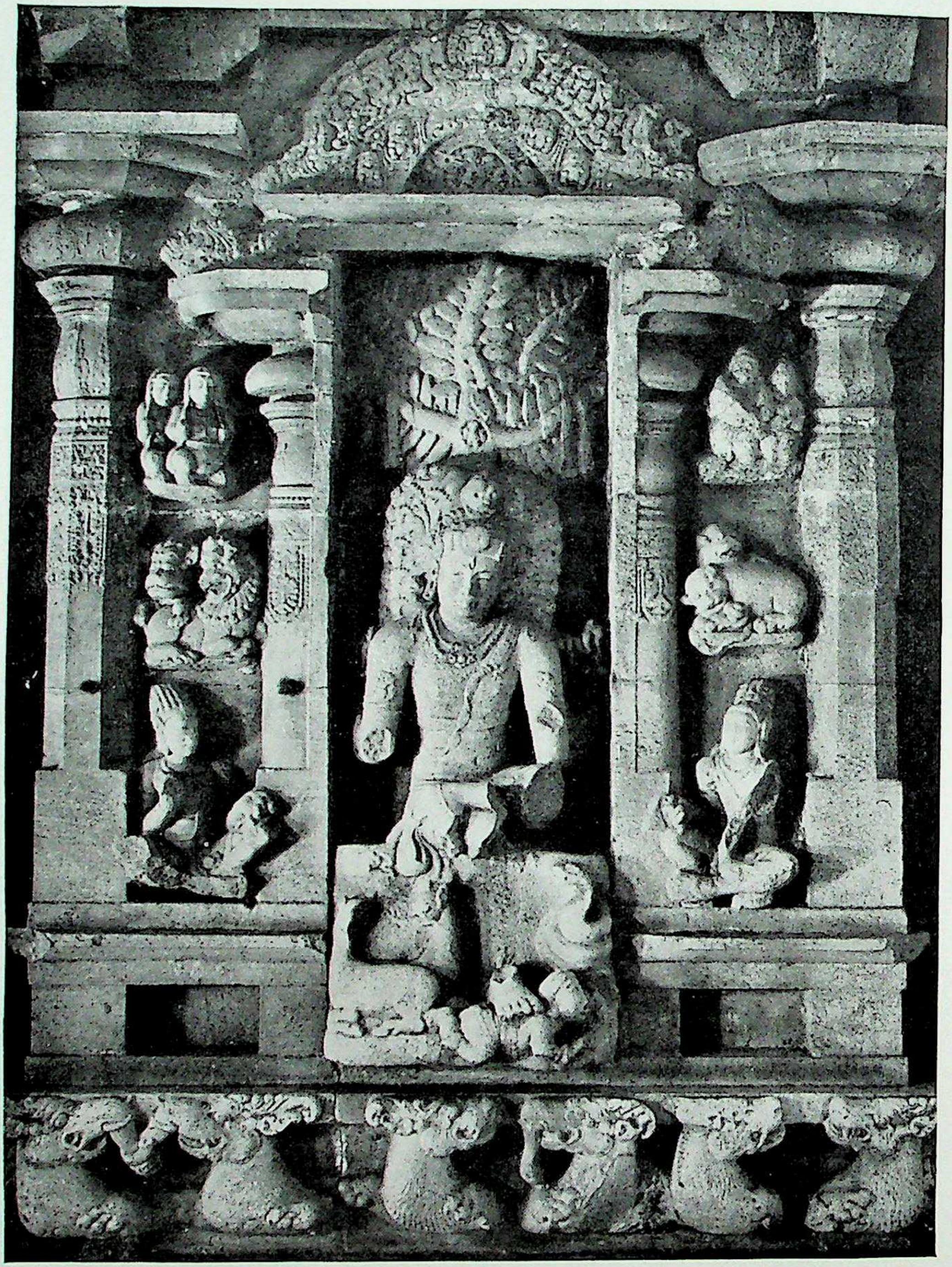

Plate 10 : Kuranganátha. The Dakshinámúrti panel.

had a Durgá as there is a pattern in the arrangement of deities in these early Chola temples. On either side of the empty bay are two female figures, obviously attendants as they carry the chámara or fan. In profile, completely moulded as to be almost in the round, these women give an appearance of unearthly loveliness. Who could they be ? Apsaras, perhaps. There she stands, on a pedestal of double lotus, looking like a surasundari (celestial beauty) arising as it were out of the lotus. A beaded rosary runs across her shoulders between the breasts quivering with life, and rests gently on her hips. Below the waist, her inviting curves are encased in folds of delicate silk. She wears beautiful jewellery, round ear rings that caress her cheeks and pearls that glisten on her hair fringe. (Pl. 11). Intensely human, the conception of these portraits is original and fresh, the poses free and easy, and the modelling refined. There was not anything like this before Chola times nor indeed afterwards.

Inside the ardhamandapa, the ceiling is supported by four pillars of immense strength. The rounded capital is surmounted by a square abacus that is held in a moulding in the form of an open lotus. This pillar is conceived as one of the heavenly vault, holding aloft its capital, the precious lotus jar of immortality. (Pl. 12).

The garbhagriha is empty but no doubt originally contained a lingam. Siva in this temple is known as Kuranganátha or the lord of the deer. Kuranga in Sanskrit means deer. Which one does this allude to—the deer at the feet of Dakshinámúrti or the one that ran at him at Dárukávana. Dárukávana is supposed to be near Mayúram (Tanjavúr District) and the temples around this area give abundant proof of how the Cholas were steeped in the tradition of the story of Dárukávana.

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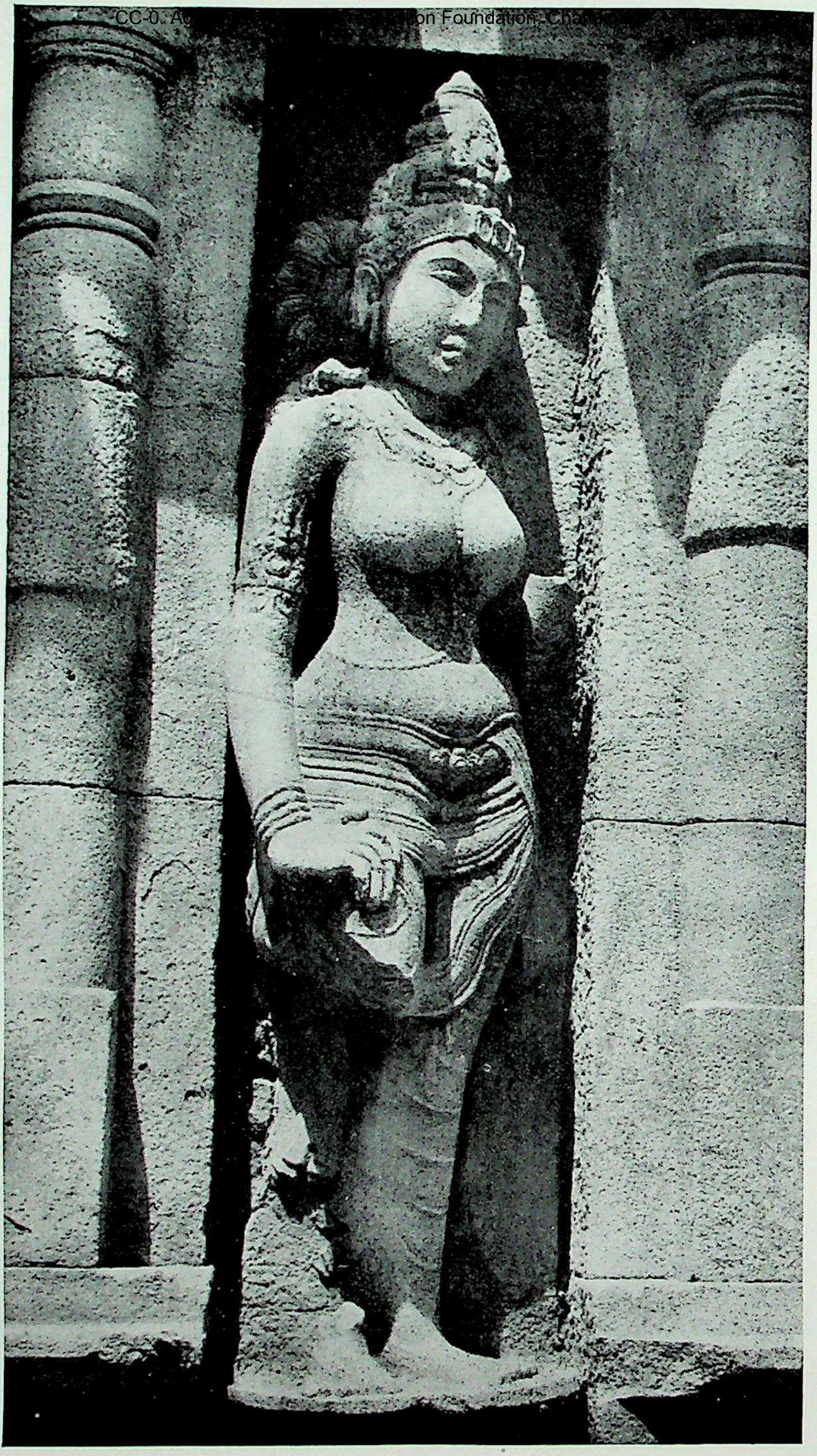

Plate 11 : Kuranganátha. Surasundari or celestial beauty.

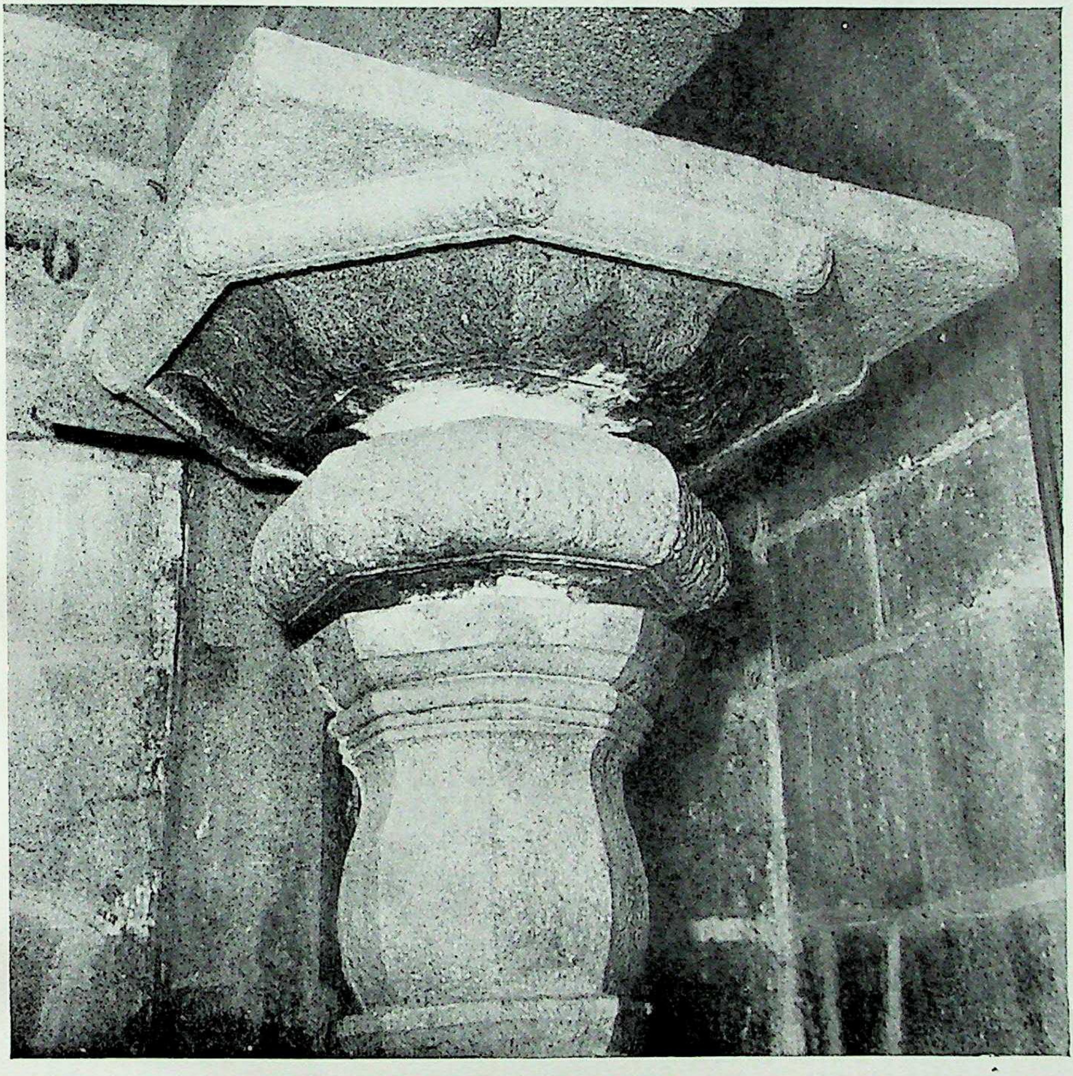

Plate 12 : Kuranganátha. Pillar inside the ardhamandapa. A typical Chola column showing the lower pot-like Kumbham, the Kalasam and the lotus shaped abacus topped by the expanded palagai.

NÁGESWARASWÁMI

The Siva temple of Nágeswara at Kumbakonam seems to belong to the reign of Áditya I. Áditya was the king who established Chola supremacy in the South. He too had close connections with both the Pallavas and Ráshtrakútas and the temples he built clearly show the influence of Pallava art and Ráshtrakúta culture.

We know that this temple too had a number of sub-shrines around the main temple. The pattern of the temple, vimána and ardhamandapa follows that of Kuranganátha. But there is no upper brick laid structure ; the vimána rises straight from the parapet. The upper tiers of the vimána are now finished in stucco but they must have been originally of stone. An early photograph shows the inverted lotus like base rising out of the pit but unlike the other temple there is no line of living yális above the rounded base. The disposition of the embedded pilasters, the bays and niches is the same but there are no frolicking Siva attendants or animals under the top cornice. Instead there are alluring dancing figures in the dance pose known as lalita filling the angles between the corbels, supporting them as it were. These remind one of the bracket maidens (sálamanjika) of the Sanchi gates.

The sculpture on the denticulated walls of the vimána are full length figures in bold relief which recall the image of saints, occupying niches in Gothic cathedrals. (Pl. 13). One of the figures, obviously a saivite saint, is portrayed in a mood of seraphic tranquility. (Pl. 14).

The growth of saivite fervour and the hymns of the Náyanárs, saivite saints, gave fresh life to mythology. The sculptor's devotion and his vision of the world he knew are reflected in these figures, so marvellously carved. The grey and yellow stone glows with love. With the perceptive eye of the artist, the Chola sculptor saw how plain spaces would heighten the beauty of the

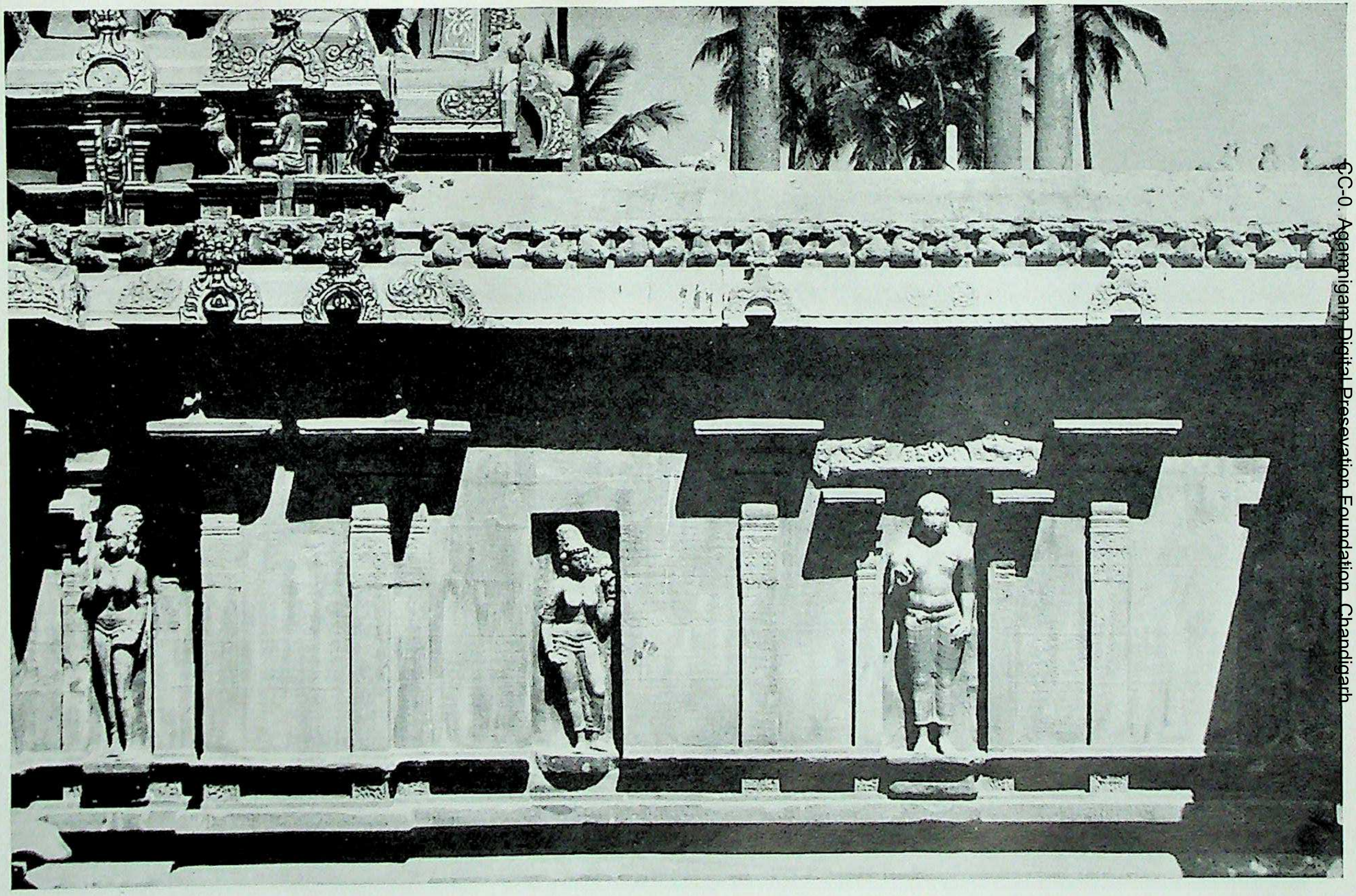

Plate 13 : Nágeswaraswámi, Kumbakonam. The sculptures on the walls of the vimana are full length figures in bold relief.

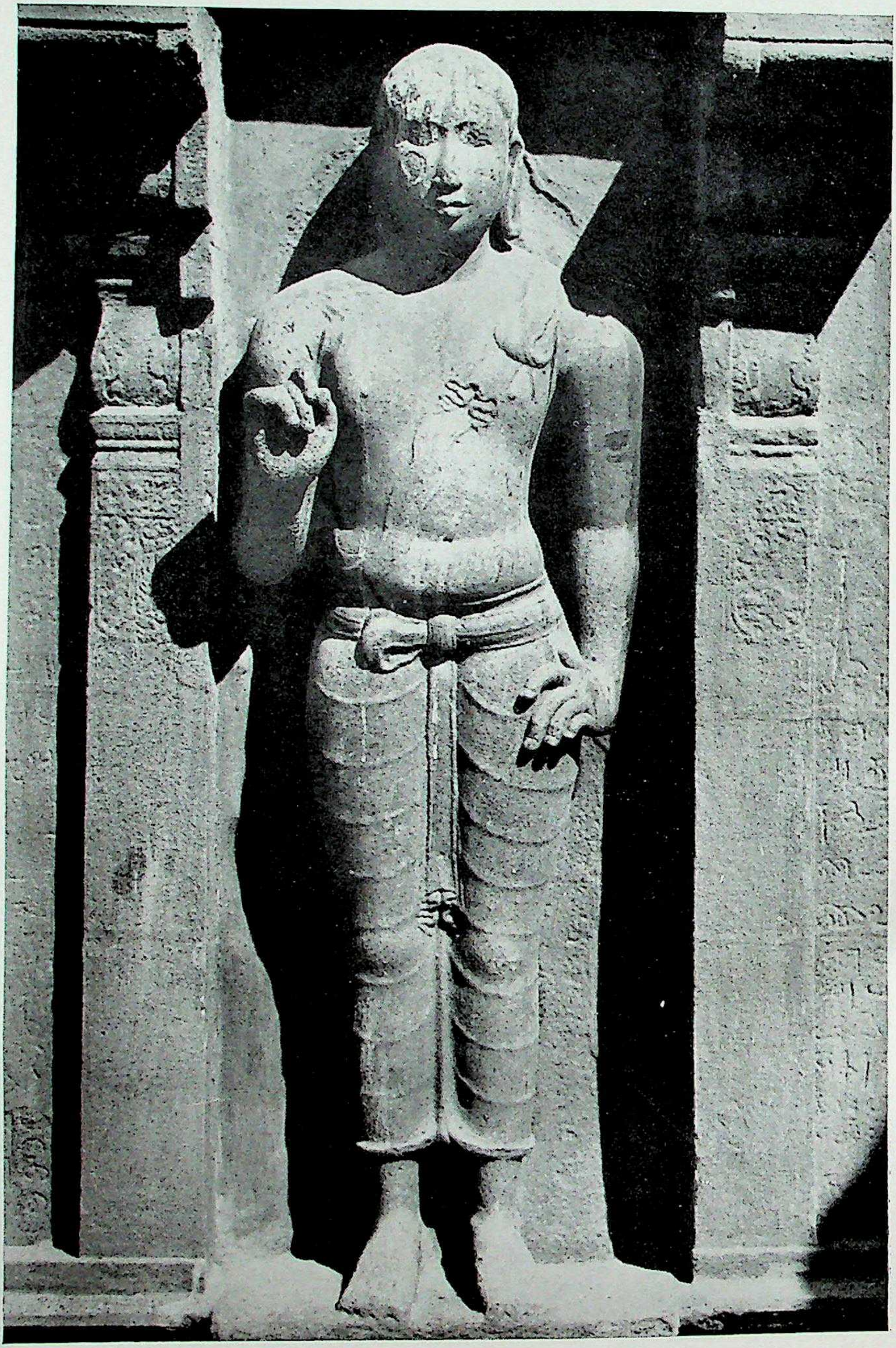

Plate 14 : Nágeswaraswámi. A Saivite Saint.

sculpture and he took care not to crowd the wall with too many figures. The live portraits of the Nágeswara temple drawn with bold flowing lines have an electrifying quality about them.

Conspicuous are the apsaras of the south wall. In contrast to the ethereal grace of Pallava sculpture, the Chola is almost sensuous in its portrayal of the joy of life. The free and easy lines give it character and there is a moving human quality in the expression. The rounded limbs quiver with life. Being in profile seems to lend the lines more alluring curves. The dress, coiffure and ornaments of the celestial maidens show exquisite taste. (Pl. 15). On the west wall is Siva as Ardhanári, half man, half woman. This embodies Siva and Sakti, the twin principles of the passive and dynamic force in the Universe. The sweeping lines of this epicene god are striking, the head, the torso and the legs being in contrary curves. The lithsome arm rests on the left hip; the face is serene on the right side and captivatingly bewitching on the left. It is a single human form of subdued grace and compassion. (Pl. 16).

Brahma on the north wall seems full of understanding reasonableness. The nobility of his bearing is so real that one lowers the head involuntarily. (Pl. 17).

Then comes Durgá or Mahishásura-mardini, standing on Mahisha or the buffalo-headed demon. Tall and slender with full breasts, the left hip curved to the full, she seems the very incarnation of beauty and power. How can one doubt it ? Had she not come out of the combined energies of all the supreme gods in order to destroy Mahisha, the demon who symbolised greed, insufferable egoism and insatiable thirst for power ? The proud smile and the taut body speak of the worlds of dynamic energy contained within.

The small panels (six inches by four) at the base of each pilaster carry narrative sculpture. Here in the Nágeswara temple it is the story of Ráma that is told in stone. (Pl. 18). It gives us a vivid picture of the temple in Chola days and how it was then the centre of life, social, religious and cultural. The temple served the purpose of a modern theatre, museum or school. No doubt

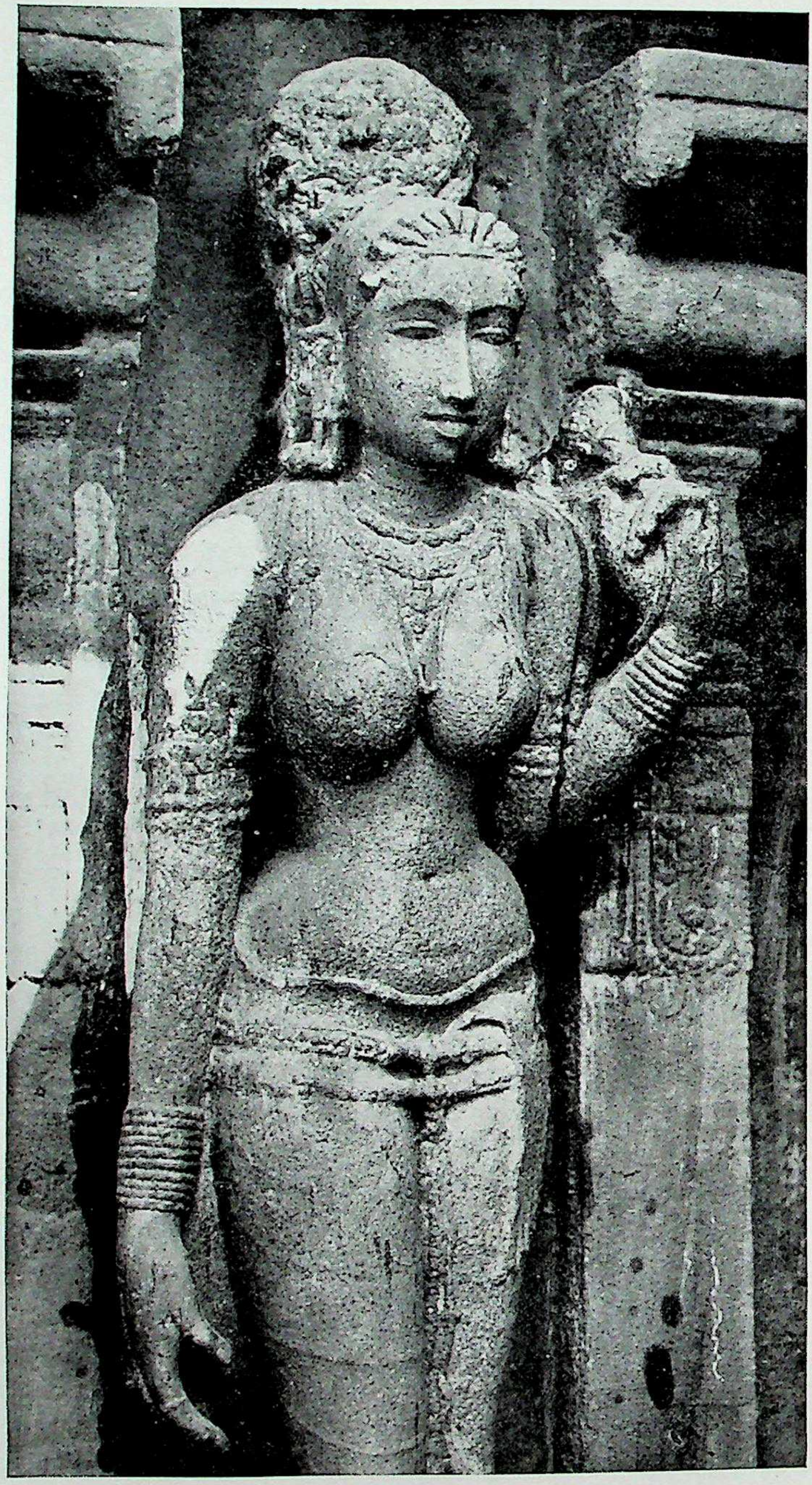

Plate 15 : Nágeswáraswami. Apsara or celestial maiden.

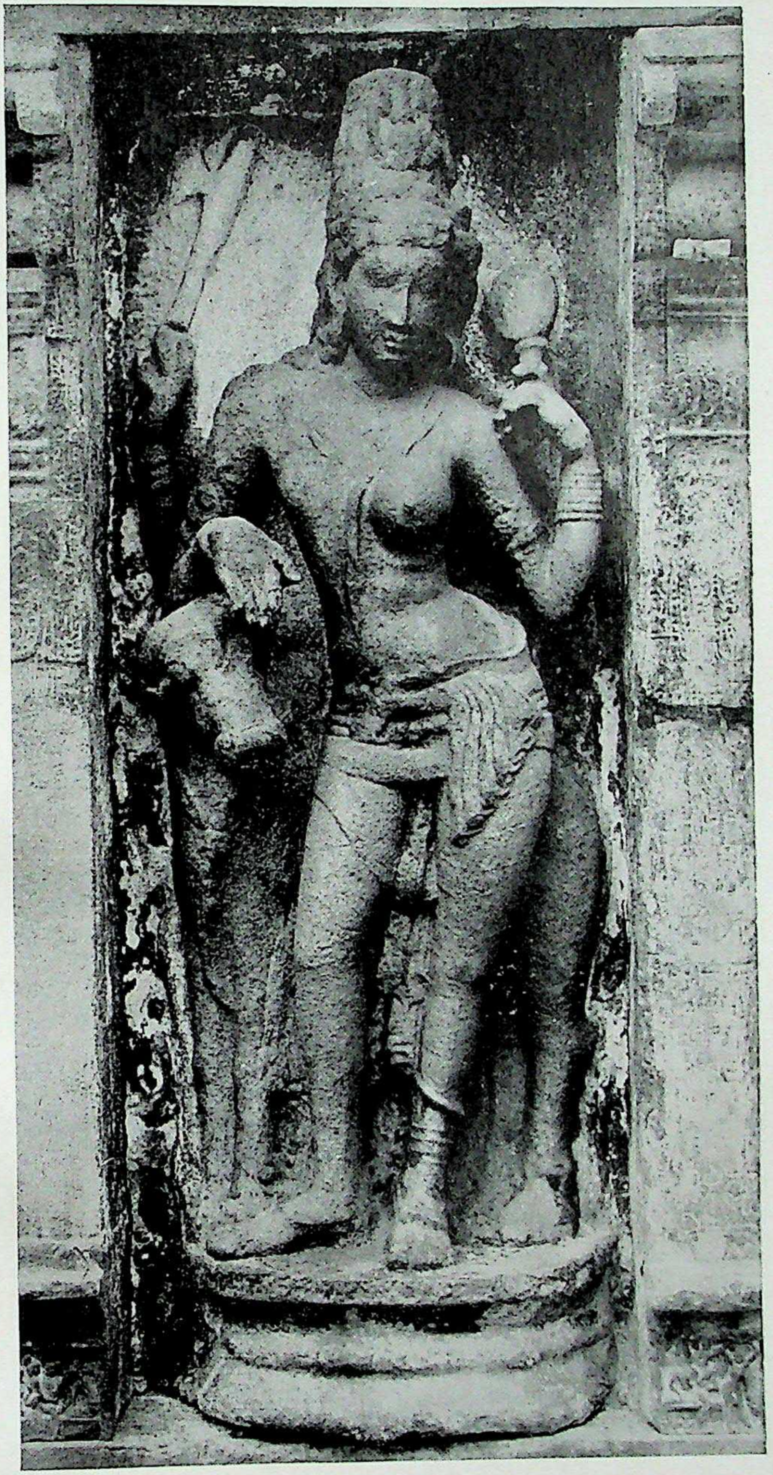

Plate 16 : Ardhanári.

the story of Ráma resounded in the courtyard and the sculptor worked with the divine verses ringing in his ears. No doubt young maidens with rounded hips and full busts paid their obeisance to the deity in dance, keeping measure with their feet. The sound of their jingling dance bells must have created turmoil in his heart which he translated into stone. And the saivite saints, smeared with fresh ash, must have wandered about the courtyard, singing hymns of praise to Siva.

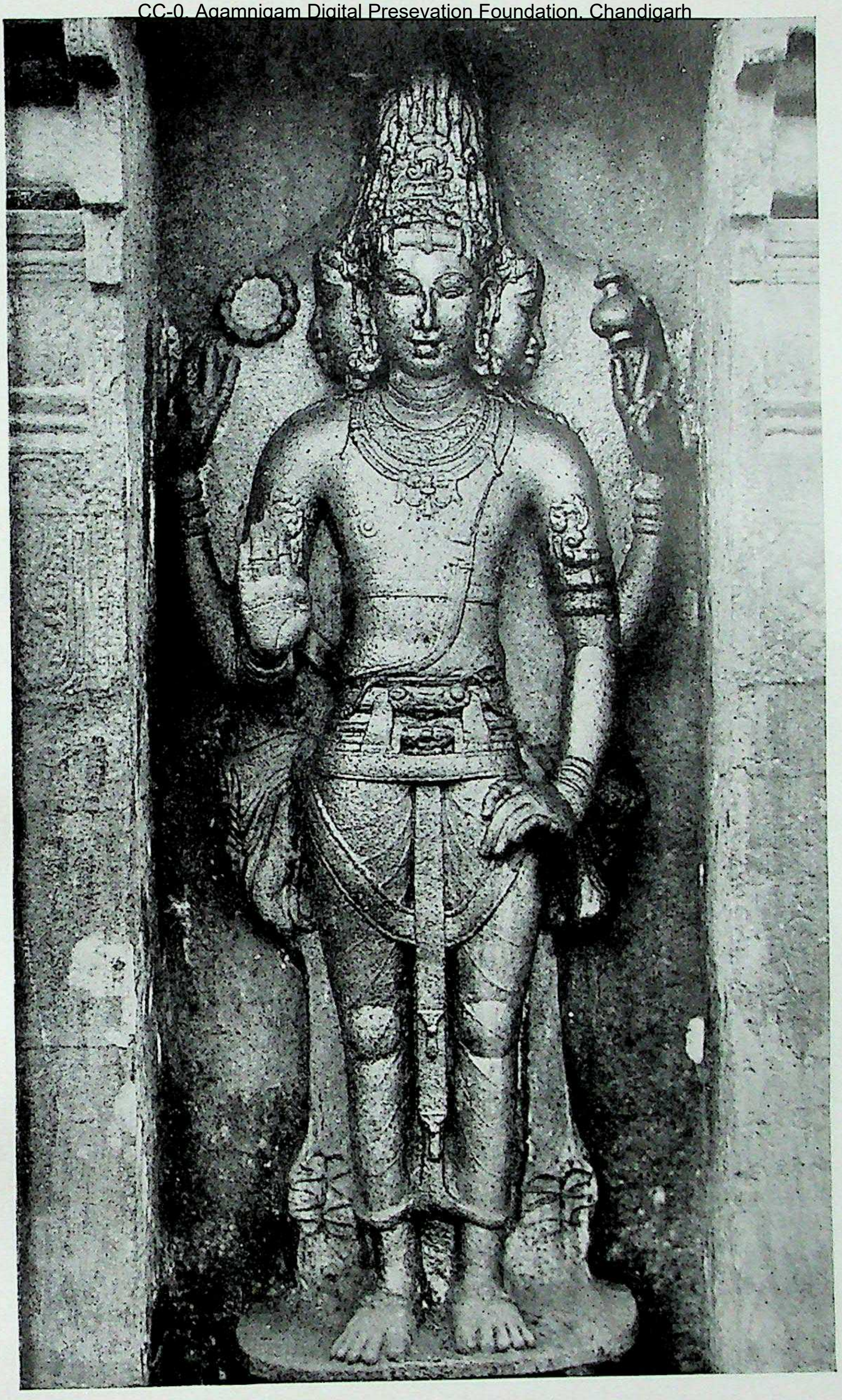

Plate 17 : Nágeswaraswámi. Brahma.

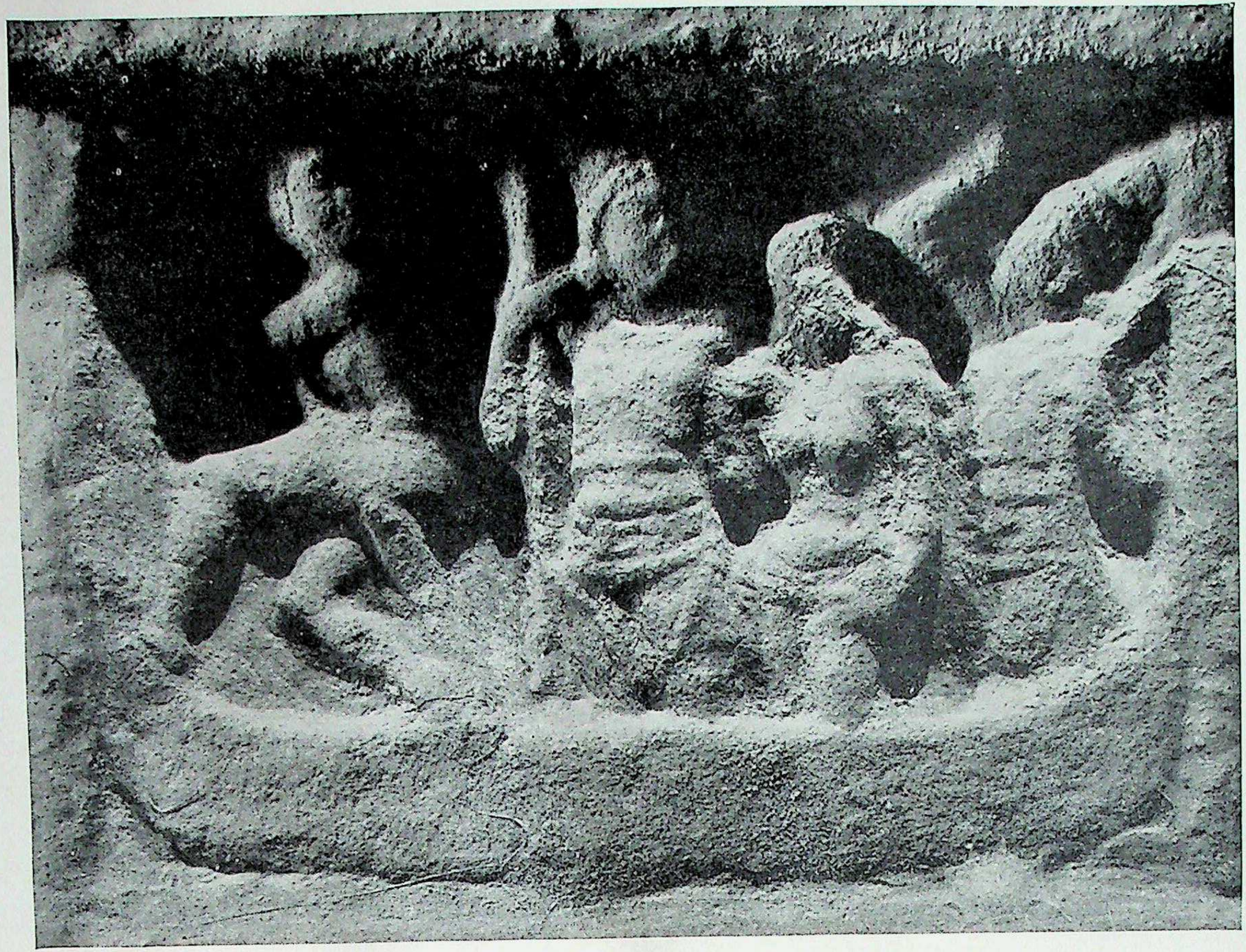

Plate 18 : Nágeswaraswámi. The small panels at the base of the pilasters tell the story of Ráma. This one shows Ráma, Sita and Lakshmana in a boat, crossing the Ganga.

BRAHMAPURÍSVARA

At Pullamangai, near Pasupatikovil, seven miles from Tanjavúr is another Siva temple (Brahmapurísvara) that is similar in construction to the Nágeswara temple.

The earliest inscription in this temple belongs to the eleventh year of Parántaka I who ascended the throne in 907 A.D. Parántaka I married a daughter of the Chera king, who ruled part of what is now Kerala. For the best part of his reign Parántaka's prosperity and fame was immense. He followed up his father's victories and put an end to Pándya independence. But the conquest of Madurai, the capital of the Pándyas, was a difficult task involving much fighting spread over many years. When at the end he was in possession of Madurai and wanted to crown himself there, he found the insignia of the Pándyan monarchy had been carried away and left in the custody of the king of Ceylon. His attempts to recapture them came to grief. Towards the end of his reign Parántaka I suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Ráshtrakúta king Krishna III at the battle of Takkolam.

Passing by the towered entrance and the mandapa which are modern and spoil the frontage, one comes to the ardhamandapa and vimána. The grey and yellow stone base made more mellow with age speaks of Chola splendour.

Inside the ardhamandapa there are four free standing columns. These are round with bulbous capitals and flat abacuses. The corbels have Chola roll ornaments and median bands. On either side of the doorway to the garbhagriha are two herculean "dwarapálas". These noble looking knightly figures with hands raised threateningly, appear most militant. The ardhamandapa is flat-roofed and lined with chaitya arches or kúdus. In between these are large free standing stone ganas (attendants). Pot-bellied and fantastic looking, these have a startling effect, perched as they are over the roof. The modelling of these figures has been done with great skill showing each face with a different expression. (Pl. 19).

Like Nágeswara, this temple too is single-storeyed and the tiers of the vimána have been obviously redone in brick and plaster. Here again the rounded cornice over the double base reveals the idea of a lotus rising out of a pond. The cut out wall indicates the lotus petal. The Brahmapurísvara temple is more elaborate in detail than the Kuranganátha and has greater finish.

The pilasters have bands of dancing figures and scrolls of exquisite design. At the base of each of these is a small panel of sculpture. There are some sixtyfive of these depicting stories from Hindu mythology. The corbels are heavy and have angular profiles. Over these and under the roll cornice run the usual figures. Below the heavy masonry, the gargoyle-like heads of yális, lively ganas, monkeys and elephants writhe in mass formation.

Unlike the Buddhist, the Chola sculptor did not follow the method of the ivory carver. Unerringly he cut into hard rock and his strokes were bold and flowing. There is so much similarity between the great temples of Angkor and the Chola temples of South India that it seems possible they influenced each other. It is well known that the Cholas had close trade relations with the Hindu States of Indo-China. A plinth (13th century A.D.) similar to a Chola one, with panels picturing the sports of Siva and Krishna has been discovered in modern Chuan Chou opposite Formosa.

In a bay on the south side is Ganesa, the lord of the ganas. The worshipper going round the temple will have to bow to him first. He is on a double lotus under a parasol that has a decorative scalloped border and an elaborate ornate tassel. Ganesa is shown in a spirit of rollicking fun, a delightful blend of the grotesque with the unconscious charm of infancy. On either side of him are panels full of gambolling ganas who try in vain to suppress their merriment. The elephant-headed god and his attendants exude a mood of pleasurable sportiveness. (Pl. 20).

On the north wall is Brahma, again on a double lotus with a canopy above. Three of his four heads are visible. Brahma is

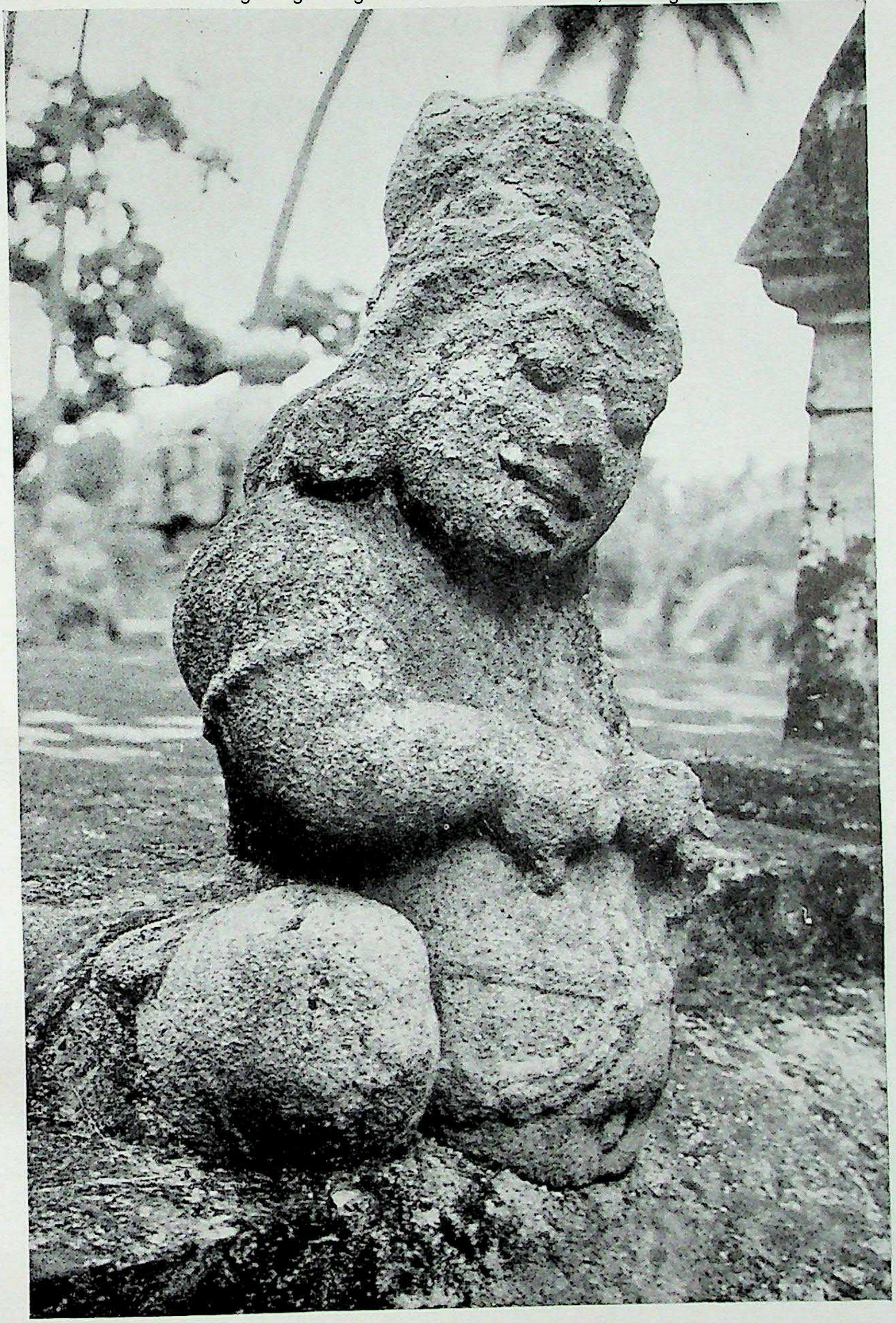

Plate 19 : Brahmapurísvara at Pullamangai. The free standing gana on the roof of the ardhamandapa.

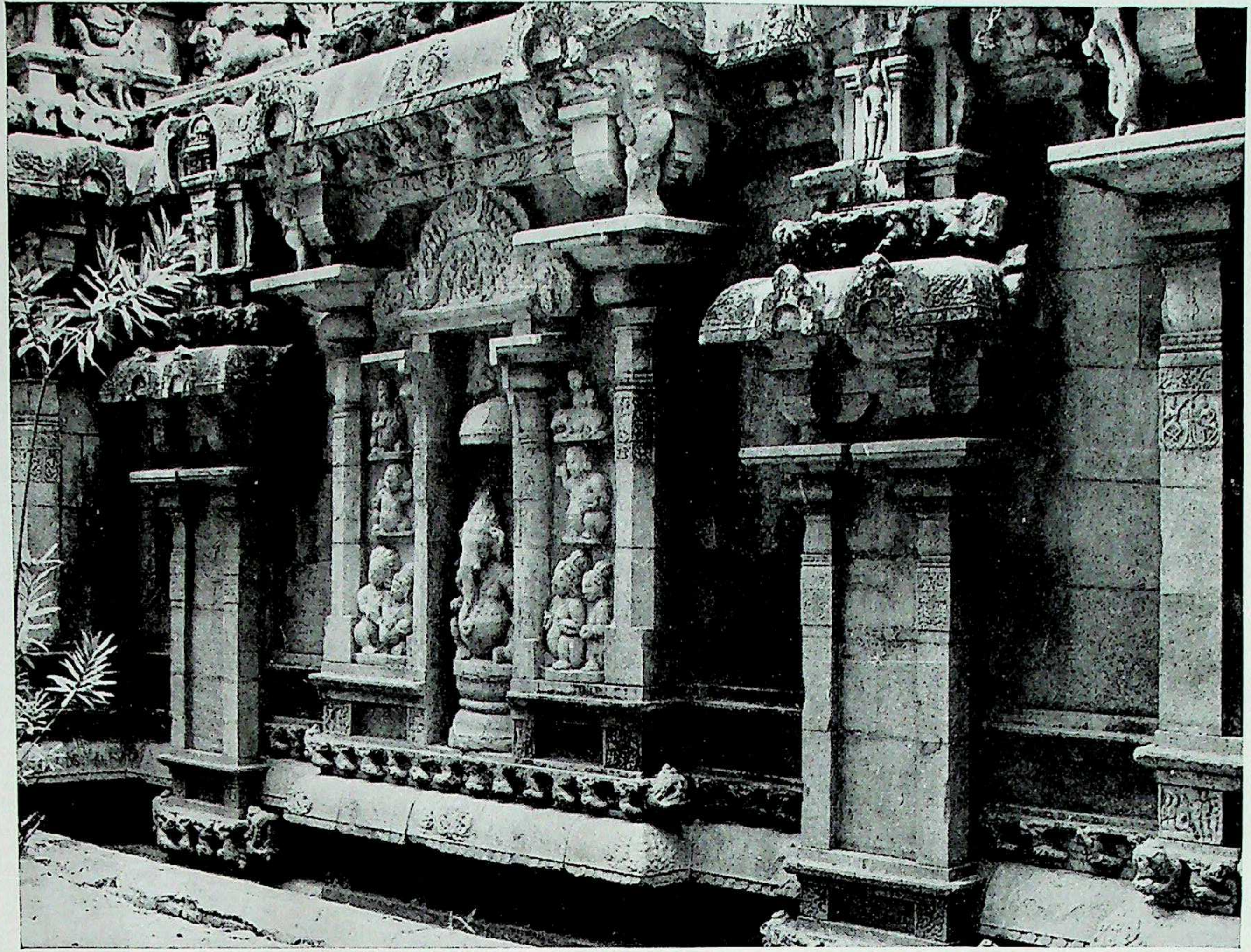

Plate 20 : Brahmapurísvara. Showing details of the cut-in wall, the Ganesa panel, the roll cornice, the ganas and the bracket maiden at the cut of the corbel.

here portrayed as a handsome young god, noble and gracious looking. (Pl. 21). The two kneeling acolytes on either side appear to be young disciples in meditation, their eyes flooded by inner light. (Pl. 22). The entire panel is a masterly study.

On the west wall is Lingodbhava with Brahma and Vishnu on either side. Siva here is depicted as issuing out of a column of flame, while Brahma is seen flying above and Vishnu as a boar, trying in vain to reach the root of the unfathomable, that is Siva. The story is that Brahma and Vishnu each assert he is the greatest of the gods. As they dispute, a great column rises before them. To prove themselves supreme each vies with the other to find the beginning and the end of it. Brahma flies into the air and tries to reach the summit, while Vishnu takes the form of a boar and digs down to undermine the base of the column.

Thousands of years of strenuous efforts are wasted. Suddenly the column bursts open and Siva appears in all his glory. (Pl. 23). As chastisement he cuts off one of Brahma's five heads and strikes Vishnu on the forehead with his trident. Retribution attends Siva too. To atone for the sin of striking off Brahma's head, he wanders the earth with a begging bowl like a mendicant.

It is thus that he visits the forest of Dárukávana. All the wives of the sages of Dárukávana except Arundhati, the wife of the sage Vasishta, follow the enticing form of the mendicant Siva. When the sages come to know of it, they grow furious and resolve to perform a sacrifice to destroy the god. From out of this sacrificial fire, they invoke a mad elephant that rushes at Siva. The god slays it. A tiger then springs up. Siva tears its body to pieces. A deer arrives. Siva smilingly grips it in his hand. Then comes a terrible figure, ugly and fearful, Apasmára. Siva stamps it down and dances over it, the dance of the Tándava. The Cholas seemed to have been fascinated by this particular legend and its details are narrated in stone in numerous temples. The small panels at the base of the pilasters at Brahmapurísvara have fine sculptures woven as it were into the very texture of the temple. There are several scenes. One shows Siva with the wives of the sages of Dárukávana. Another portrays his

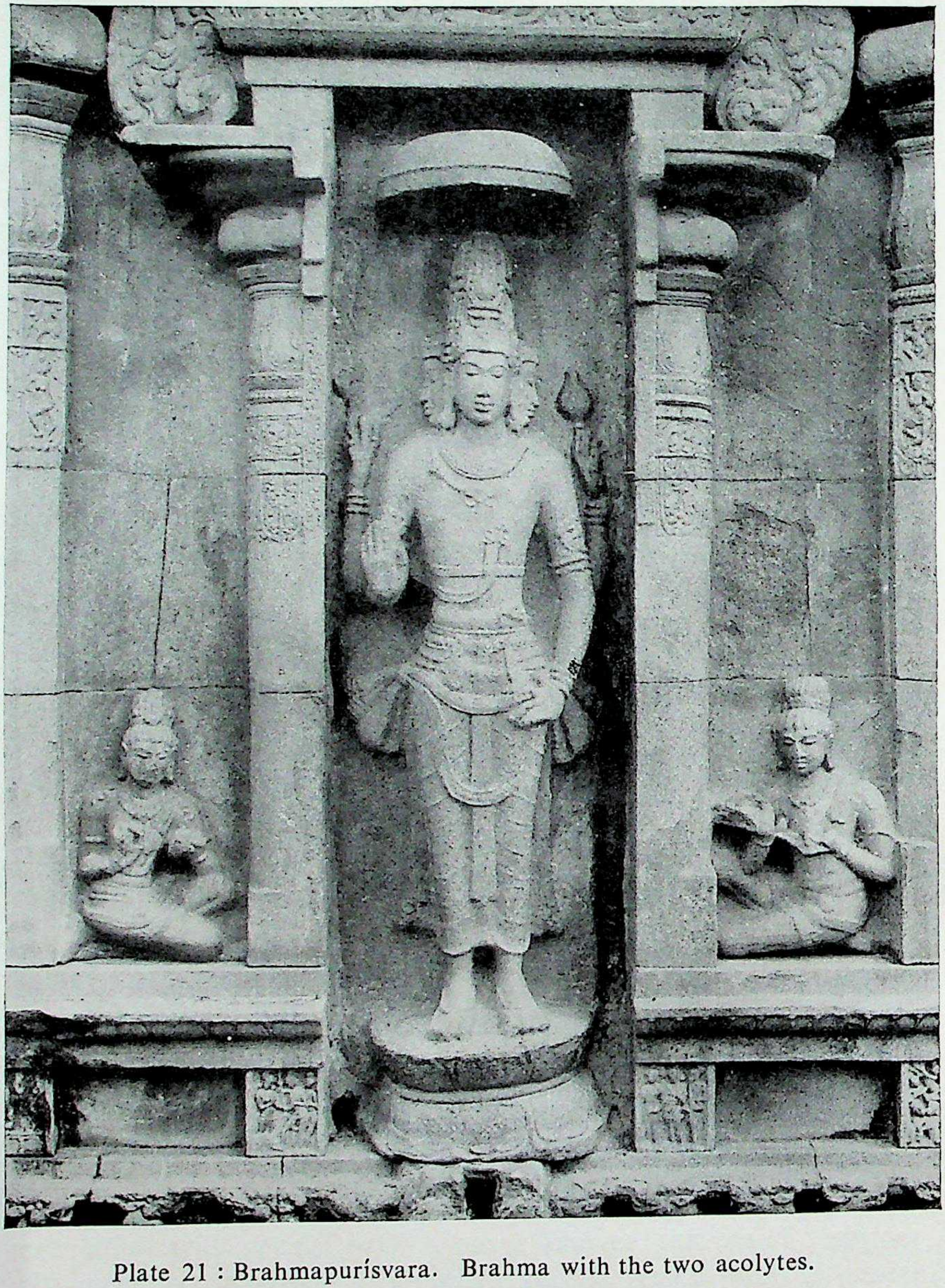

Plate 21 : Brahmapurísvara. Brahma with the two acolytes.

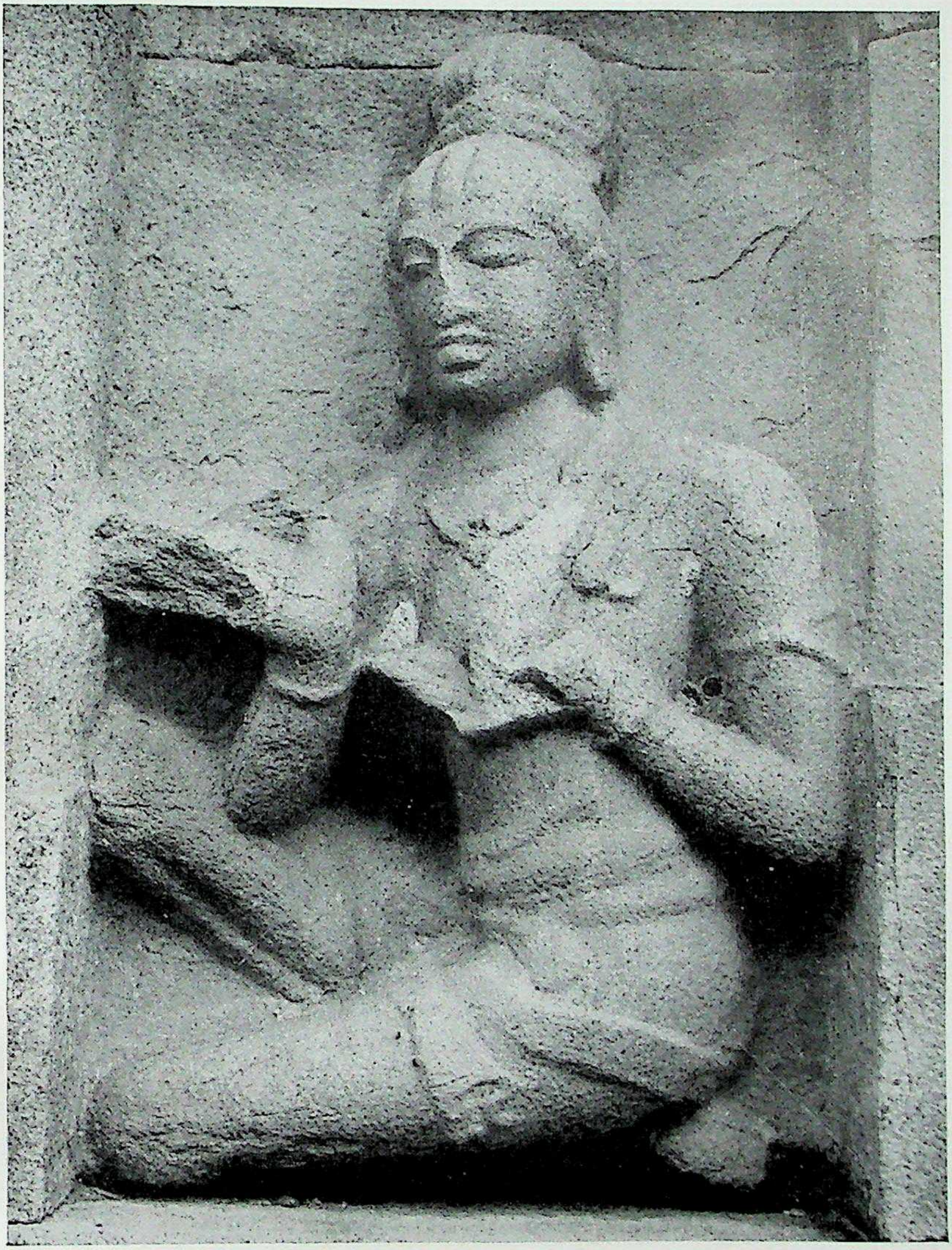

Plate 22 : Brahmapurisvara. The acolyte.

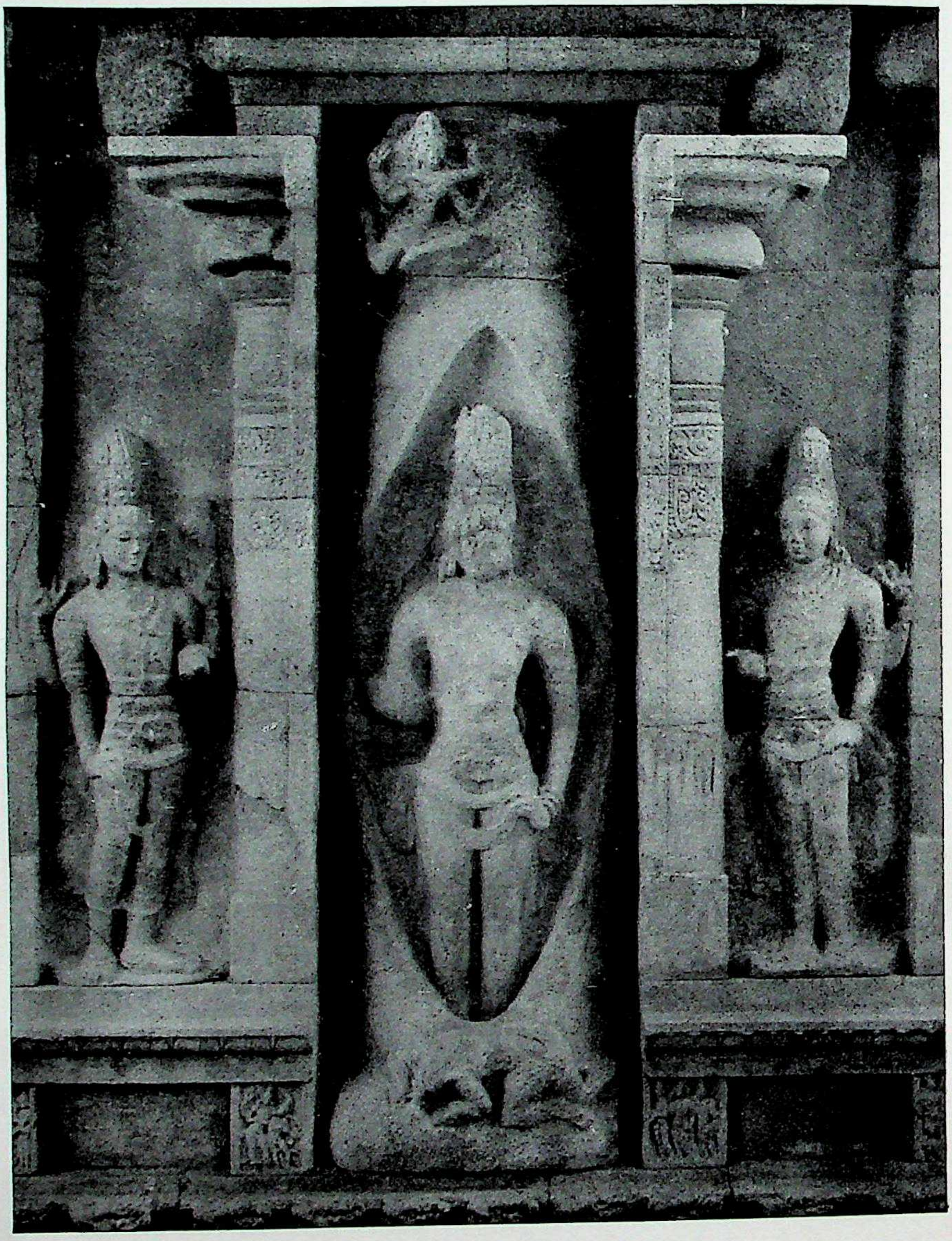

Plate 23 : Brahmapurisvara. Lingodbhava with Brahma and Vishnu on either side.

slaughtering the demon of disease. A third depicts him in a swirling movement of the Tándava dance. (Pl. 24).

Besides Brahma in the north wall, in a separate niche, is Durgá with eight arms standing on the head of the buffalo-demon, Mahisha. A sweeping curve which is in keeping with the movement of the jewelled arms and legs exalts the beauty of this warlike Athena. The proud smile playing about her lips and the contrasting light and shade of her curves give her an air of mystery and awe. (Pl. 25).

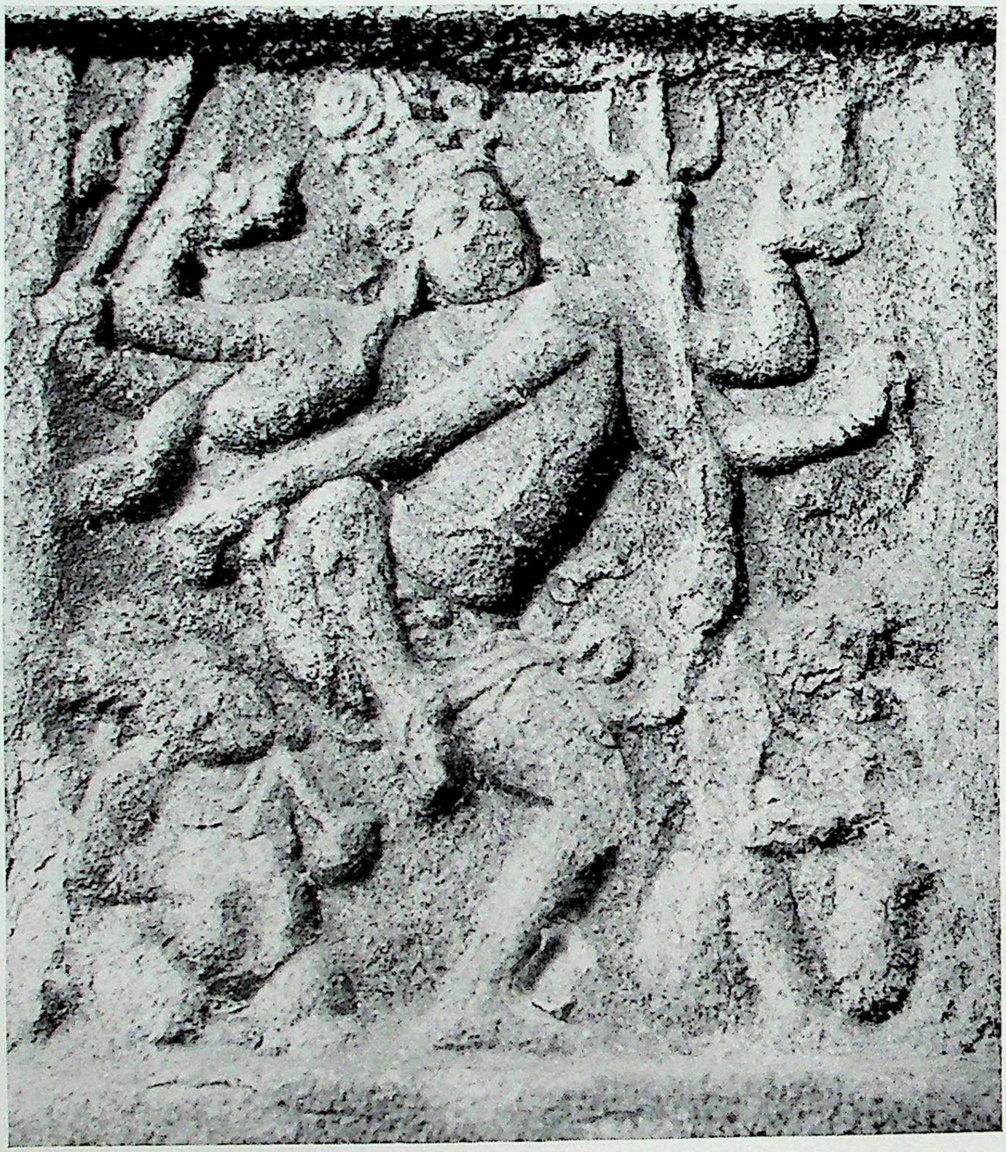

Plate 24 : Brahmapurísvara. A panel at the base of a pilaster showing Siva dancing.

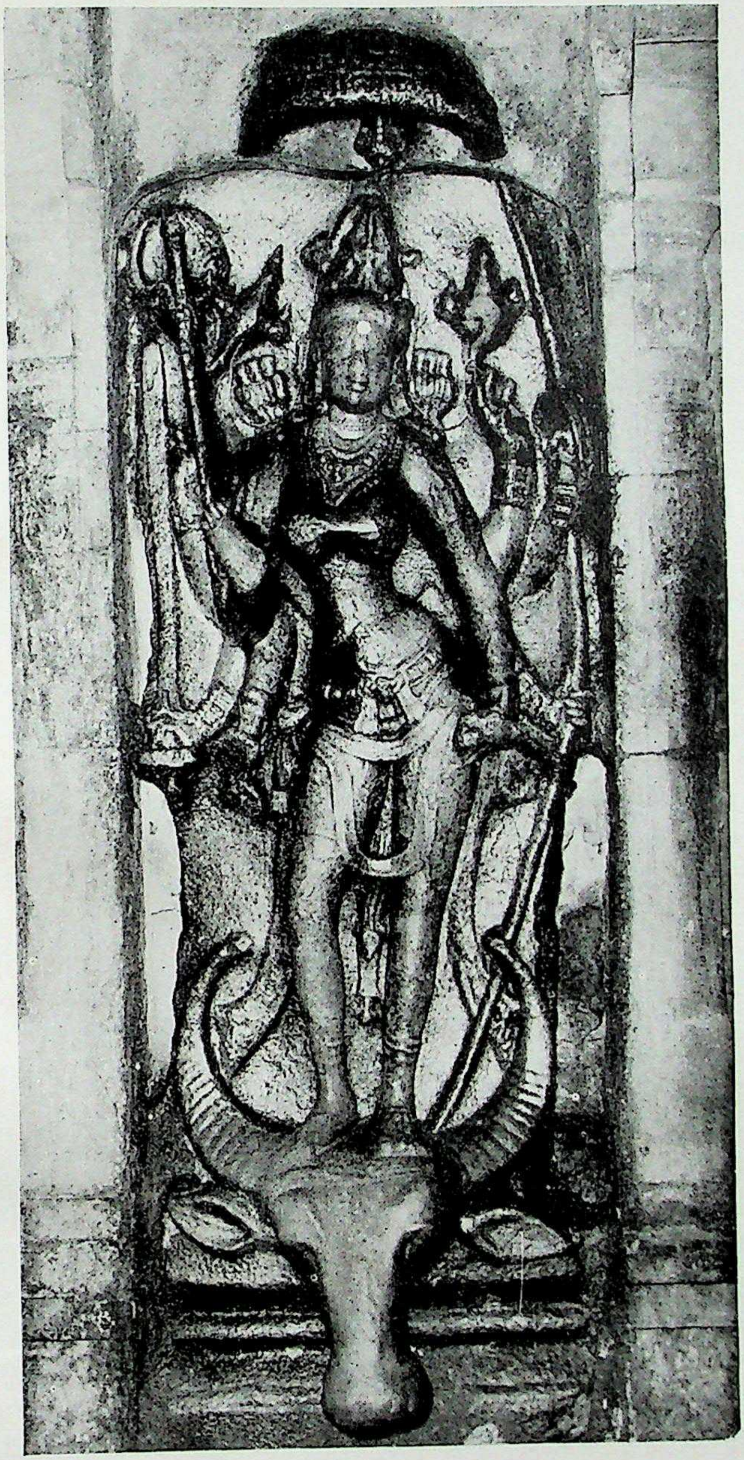

Plate 25 : Brahmapurísvara. Durgá or Mahishásura-mardini, standing on the head of the buffalo-demon.

AGASTÍSVARA

The Chola kings were ardent worshippers of Siva. Under their benevolent patronage the saiva saints were inspired to compose thousands of hymns in praise of Siva. Such were the times when there existed on the banks of the Káveri, nearly two hundred temples consecrated to Siva.

Of these, the twin temples of Agastísvara and Cholísvara belong to the reign of Áditya (870 A.D.) and a little later. (Pl. 26). The temples are at Kilaiyúr on the road to Ariyalúr thirty miles from Tiruchirápalli. Kilapaluvúr is nearby.

The powerful chieftains of Kilapaluvúr, known as Paluvettaraiyárs were connected by marriage to the Cholas. Parántaka I was married to a daughter of this family. There is reason to believe from certain inscriptions that they were originally from Kerala. Sambandar the Tamil saint-poet also indicates that the family who worshipped the deity at Paluvúr were from Kerala. This family did a great deal for the maintenance of the shrines. Agastísvara was evidently built about A.D. 884 and Cholísvara a few years later. The style of converting granite into contrasting planes of light and shade and infusing into it an air of religious mystery and awe is carried to perfection here. If eyed from a height the composition would show distinction, grace and balance. The entrance to the two shrines is covered by a gopuram of brick work that has two dwarapálas of noble mien guarding it on either side. The scroll work over the jambs and lintels of the doorway is most ornamental. Once inside the courtyard, the atmosphere is completely Chola. There are four sub-shrines placed against the walls. These though small are elegant and complete in form, having curvilinear sikharas. Of the two, the main temple is Agastísvara. It is as usual built entirely of stone. The ardhamandapa has four massive pillars with cushioned capitals and the outer mandapa, unique rows of lion-pillars. Inscriptions say that all these belonged to the same period.

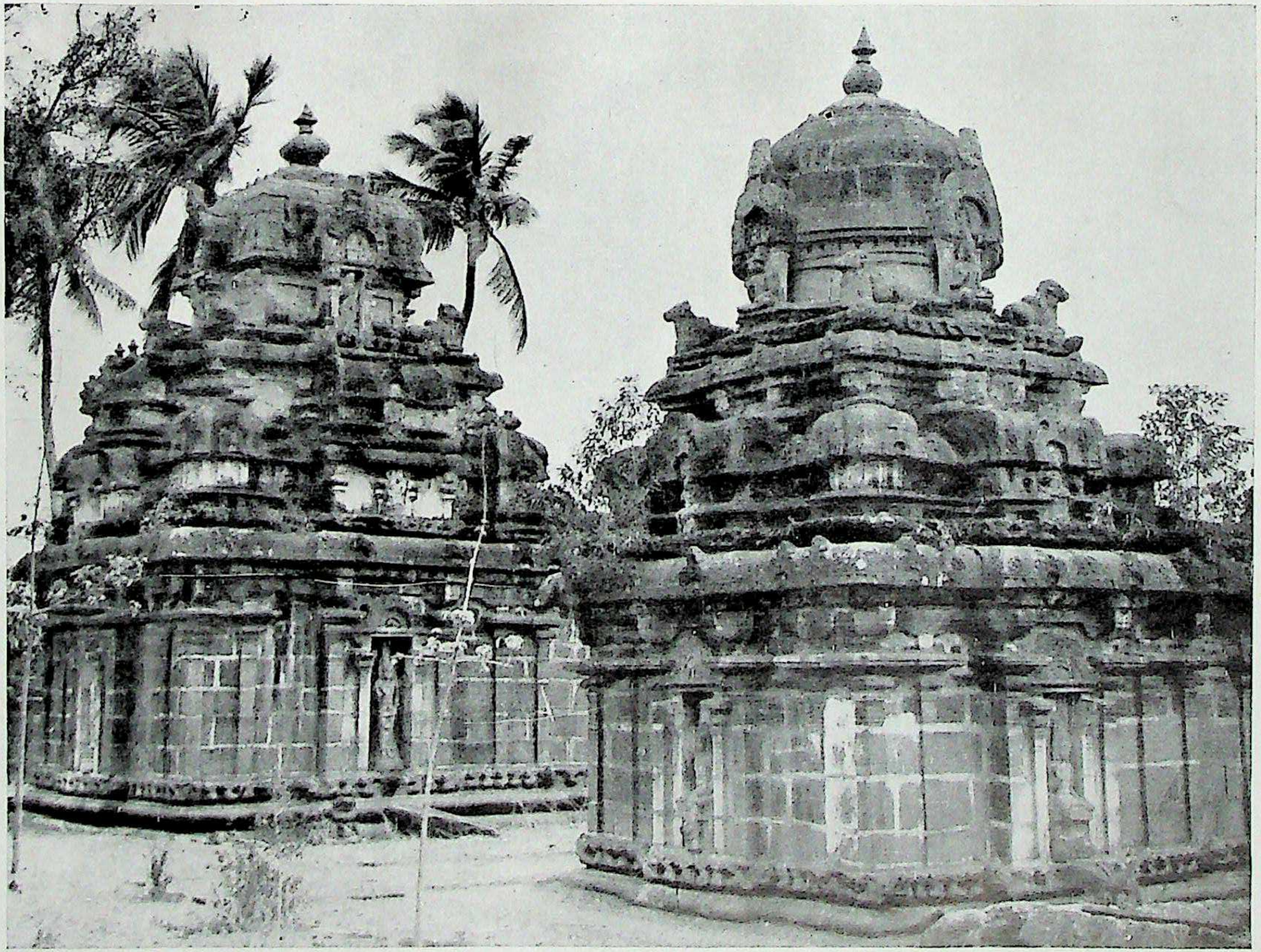

Plate 26 : The twin temples Agastísvara (left) and Cholísvara (right) at Kilaiyur.

It is a typical Chola building, a flat-roofed ardhamandapa, with the vimána rising in diminishing tiers over the garbhagriha. The base is heavy in the form of a double lotus. Above it is a frieze of gargoyles in joyful playfulness. The cuts along the walls are few and the inversions not deep. It is a plain surface on which the embedded pilasters with their varied rounded tops and sunshade palagais show to advantage. The roll cornice as usual is underpinned by brackets with angular powerful looking corbels. But it would seem as if it were the line of Siva's favourite goblins, dancing and playing musical instruments under the cornice that carried the whole weight. So grotesque and twisted are their forms. (Pl. 27). Over the cornice come the usual line of gargoyles while the chaitya windows on the roll have swans instead of laughing faces. The rest of the pattern, in the upper tiers, is as elsewhere. The arches over the niches in the gríva or neck of the dome however are topped by lions' heads, an unusual feature. These arches are also adorned with delicate scroll work. The four corners on the parapet along the dome have superb nandis. The dome itself is four cornered and curvilinear topped by a square stupi. (Pl. 28).

The figures in the niches are blended with lyrical harmony. Subramanya in the eastern wall is draped in fine transparent material. The richness of the ornaments and dress make this youthful god shimmer with a divine radiance. There is a subdued glow about his powerful limbs that makes one fear for the fate of those who meet him in battle. The canopy of the half umbrella is noteworthy.

Dakshinámúrti in the south is full of serene beauty. It seems Siva was seated facing south when he taught the philosophy of Yoga to the sages Nárada, Jamadagni, Vasishta, Bhrigu, Bharadwája, Sanaka and Agastya.

A great teacher of music, Siva is worshipped in the form of Vinádhara Dakshinámúrti. This figure is on the western side of the neck of the dome. It is a most entrancing figure, the tender moulding of the limbs throbbing with life. His right leg gently raised, he rests the Vina on it and is in the act of playing. He

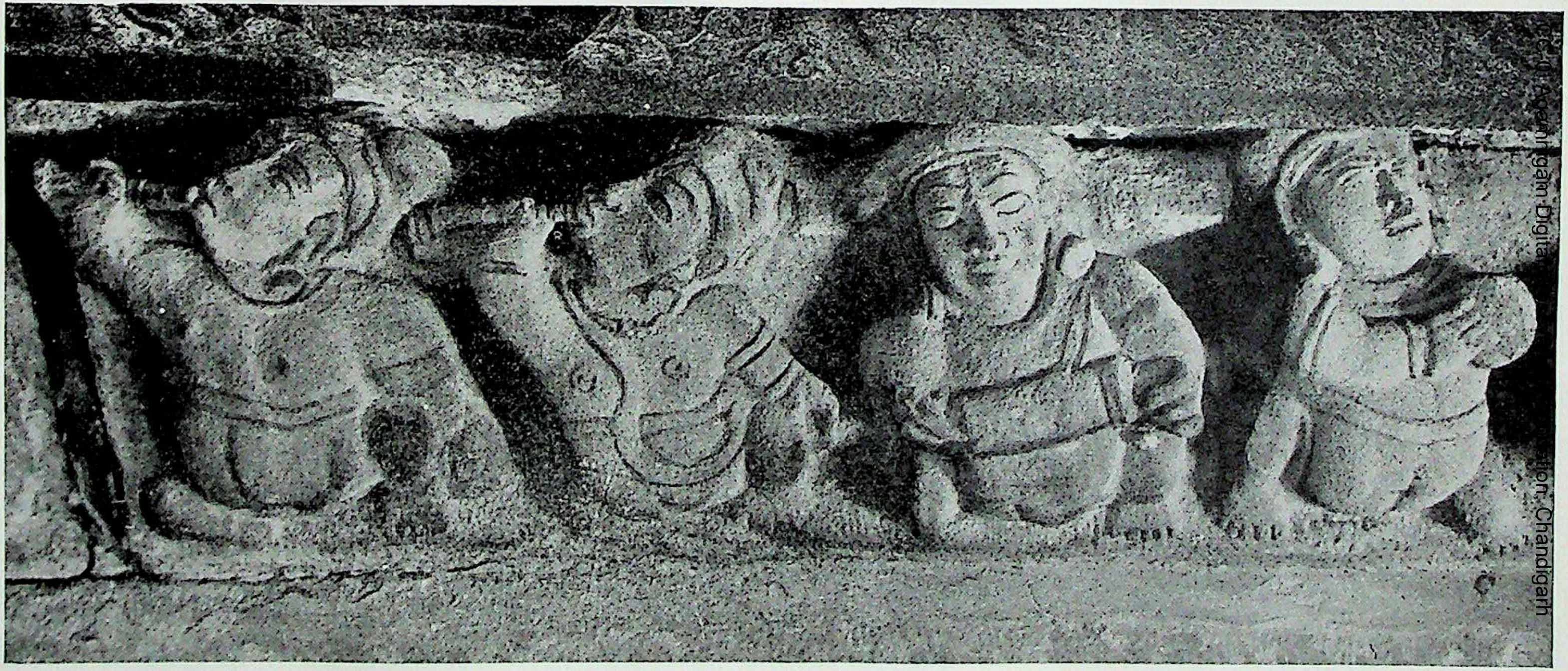

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Plate 27 : Agastísvara. Siva's favourite ganas, dancing and playing musical instruments under the cornice.

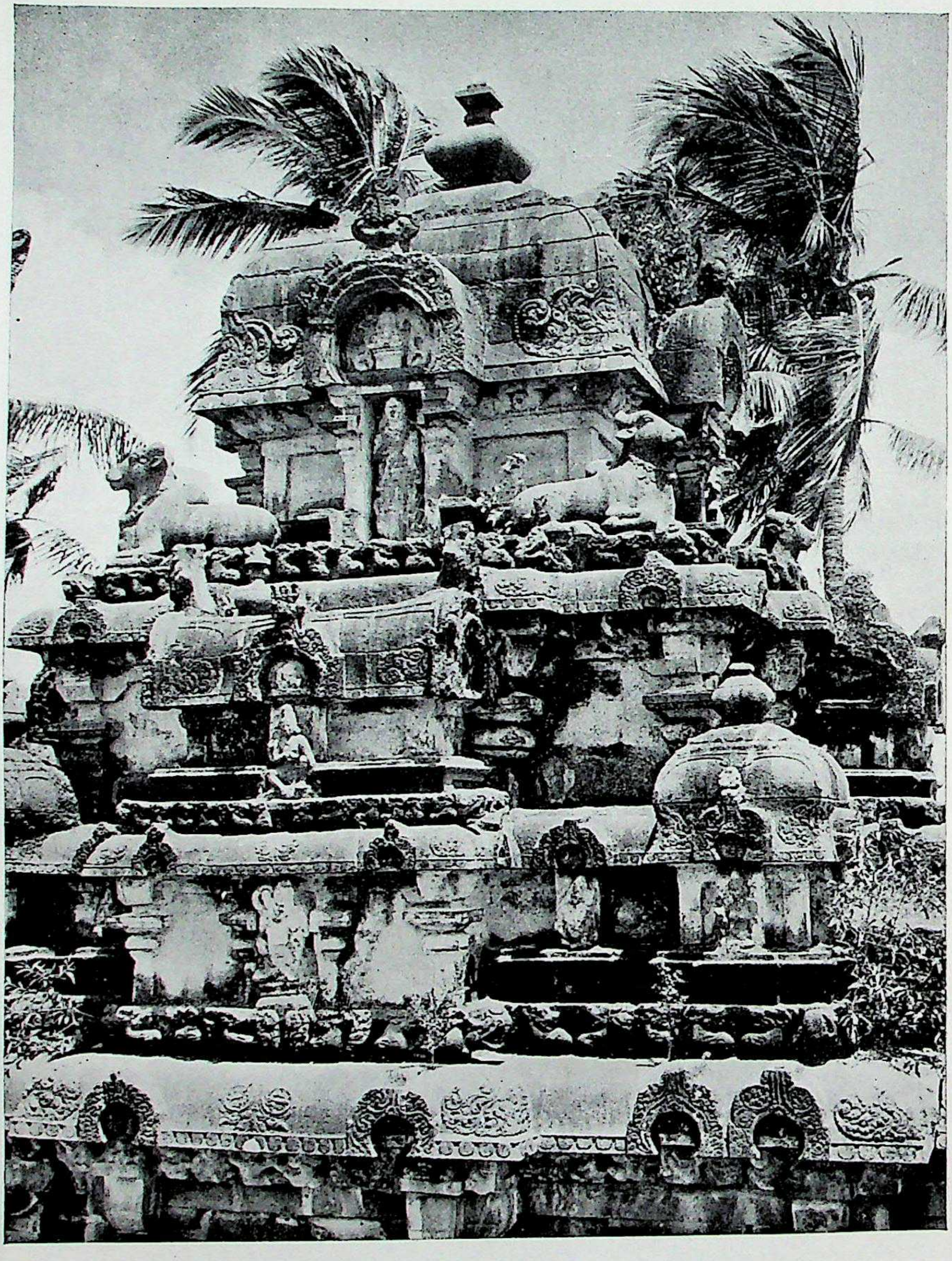

Plate 28 : Agastísvara. The four corned dome and the square stupi. Note on the tier below the rectangular waggon—shaped chaitya and the domical cell.

seems lost in the musical sounds of his creation, the sounds that resound through the universe. The folds of the silk garment show off his figure, and necklaces and ear drops glimmer in the sunlight.

The figure of Brahma, in the northern wall, is a standing one. In the second tier he is seated and once again appears standing in the gríva. The standing figure of the creator in the wall is the embodiment of gracious nobility typical of Chola sculpture. The arched friezes over the niches on the wall contain finely drawn inset figures. Natarája or the dancing Siva in the southern bay, and Gajasamhára-múrti or the slayer of the elephant in the northern bay are remarkable.

CHOLÍSVARA

As one enters the ardhamandapa of Cholísvara, the dwarpálas strike the eye. These massive figures stand leaning on their club in an attitude of disdain. The arrogant smile on their faces reveal a mood of belligerent hauteur. The bend of the legs and the backward incline towards the club reveal powerful lines in composition.

The entire disposition of the temple is the same as Agastísvara except that the sikhara is circular and bellshaped with a round stupi. (Pl. 29). The bays in the outer wall of the vimána have Brahma in the north, Subramanya in the east and a seated Dakshinámúrti in the west.

Brahma, usually a standing figure is here shown seated with the rosary and the pot. The same Brahma in the corresponding upper tier is in padmasana, the lotus pose. He seems to wear a look of sublime aloofness, a dreamy contemplation before Creation. It was on one such occasion that the boy Rudra appeared on his lap weeping and asking to be named. At the beginning of Creation Brahma meditated, intent on having a son when a boy blue and red in colour appeared on his lap, weeping, and asking to be named. Brahma named him Rudra. But he continued to cry again and again, repeating his request seven times. Brahma duly named him Bhava, Sarva, Ísána, Pasupati, Bhíma, Ugra and Mahádeva.

The seated Subramanya on the eastern wall has his right leg resting on a double lotus. The mystic smile on his face deepens the awe.

There is a Dakshinámúrti in the southern wall. One imagines him alone in the great silence of the surrounding mountains. Deeply engrossed in contemplating the universe, he is lost to the world about him. (Pl. 30).

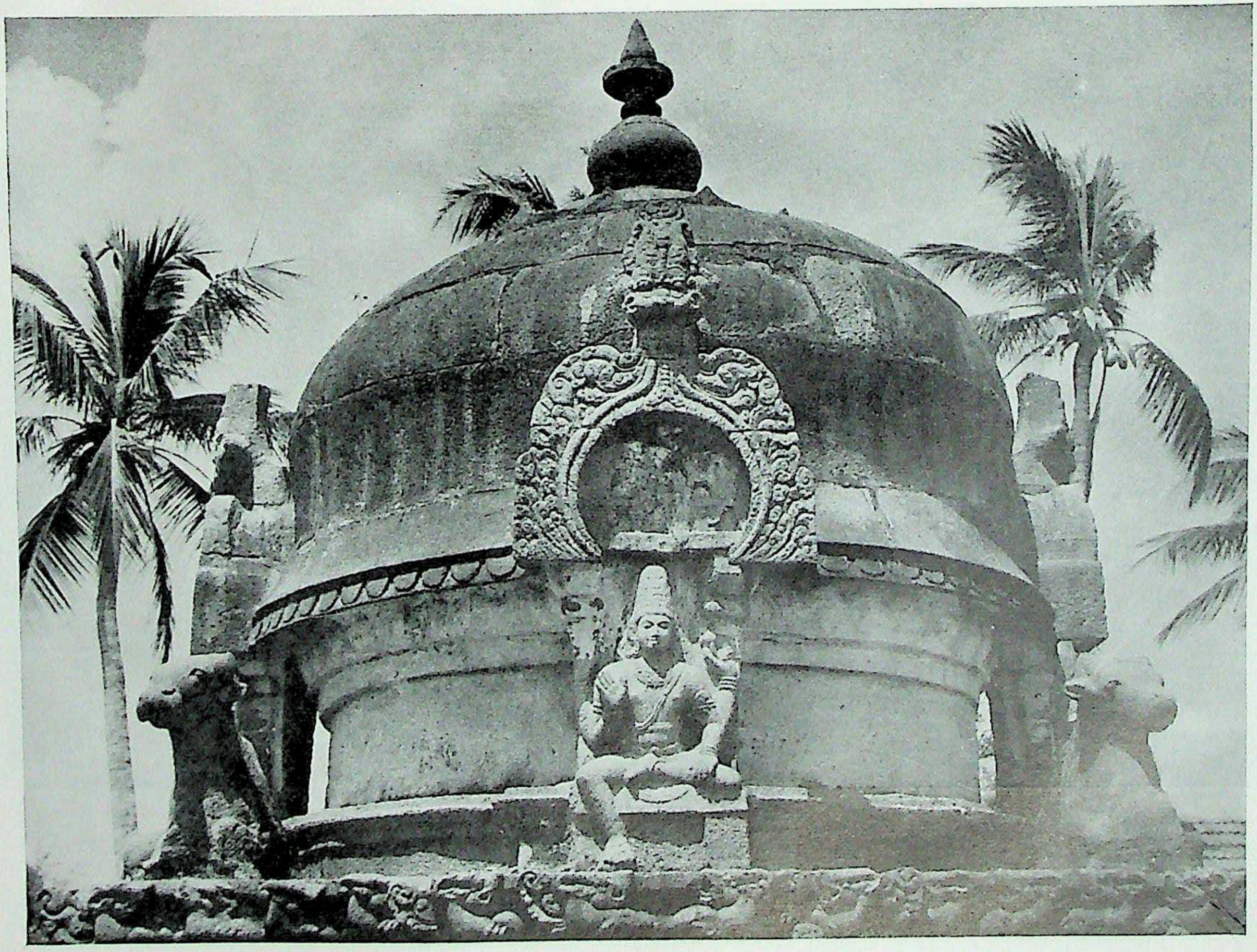

Plate 29 : Cholísvara. The bell-shaped dome with Siva in the niche of *griva*.

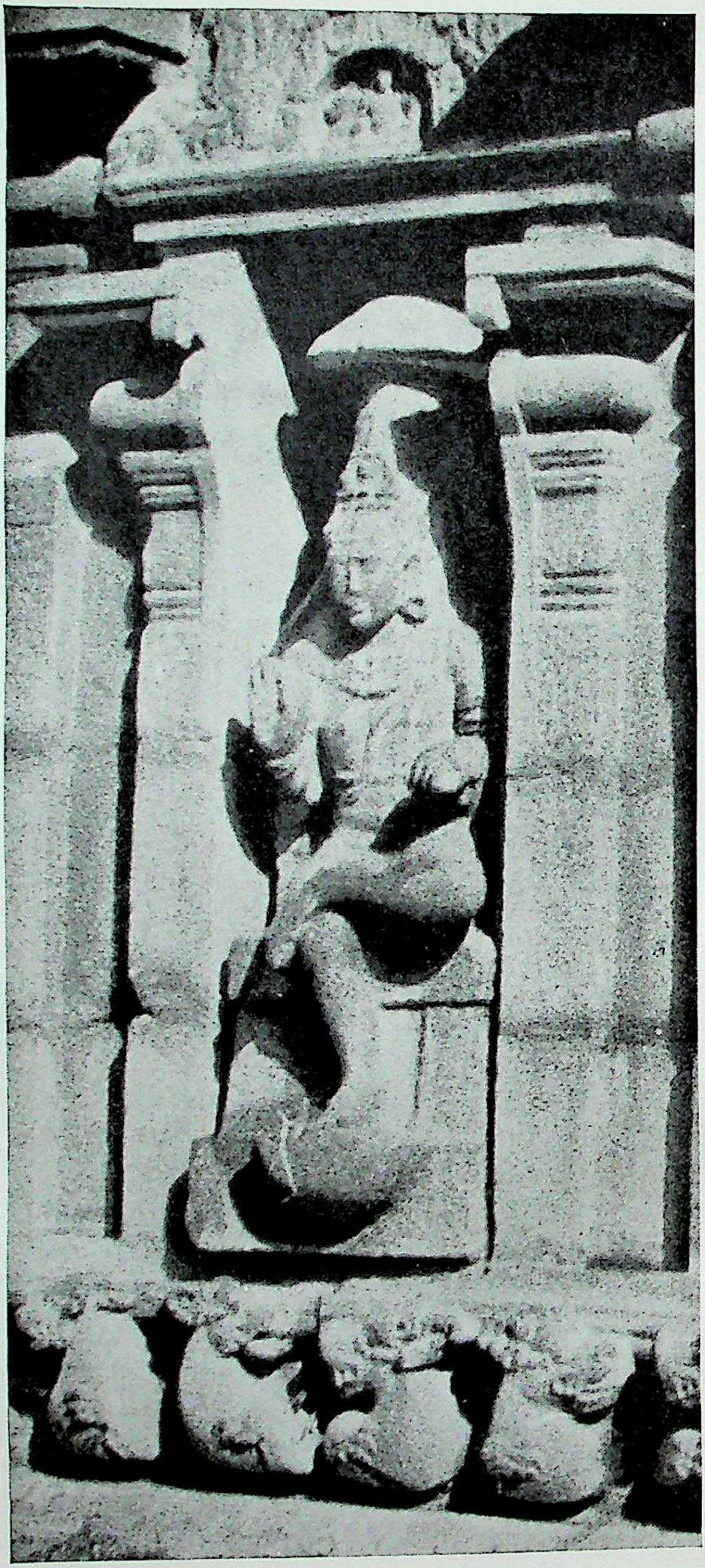

Plate 30 : Cholísvara. Dakshinámúrti in the southern wall engrossed in contemplation.

MÚVAR KOVIL

Kodumbalúr is about 27 miles west of Pudukkottai. The shrines here known as Múvar Kovil or "the temple for three", were built by the Irrukuvel chieftain Bhúti Vikramakesari in the reign of Sundara Chola Parántaka II (956-973 A.D.). The Irrukuvels had long and close connections with the Cholas. Parántaka I was aided in his Pándyan campaigns by the chiefs of Kodumbalúr. Prince Arikulakesari, one of his sons had married a daughter of Tennavan Ilangovelár of the Kodumbalúr line. Parántaka's daughter Anupama married the chief of Kodumbalúr. The three shrines were one for Vikramakesari and one each for his queens Karráli and Varaguna. Varaguna was the sister of Parántaka II. The close ties of friendship and loyalty between the chiefs of Kodumbalúr and the Cholas under Parántaka I continued under his successors and Vikramakesari assisted Sundara Chola and his son to subdue the rebellious Vira Pándya. An inscription states that Vikramakesari turned the waters of the Káveri red with the blood of the enemy army. In his deep admiration for the Chola king Parántaka II, Vikramakesari called his two sons by Karráli, Parántakan and Aditya Varma. Parántakan of Kodumbalúr continued the campaign into Pándya country and forced Vira Pándya to seek refuge in the forests.

From inscriptions we know that Múvar Kovil was built in the tenth century between 950-970 A.D. in the reign of Parántaka II, a period of certain Chola ascendancy. Experts declare that they are Chola temples and details confirm this, yet none can fail to be struck by their Pallava grace. The style and the moulding of the sculptures have the same quality of distinguished restraint which give them the distinctive Pallava air of austere charm. How did the Kodumbalúr Chola temples happen to get this touch when it is clear that the chieftains of Kodumbalúr were such staunch allies and lieutenants of the Chola sovereigns ?

Intermittent warfare went on between the Irrukuvels and the Mutturaiyárs. The Mutturaiyárs were in possession of the

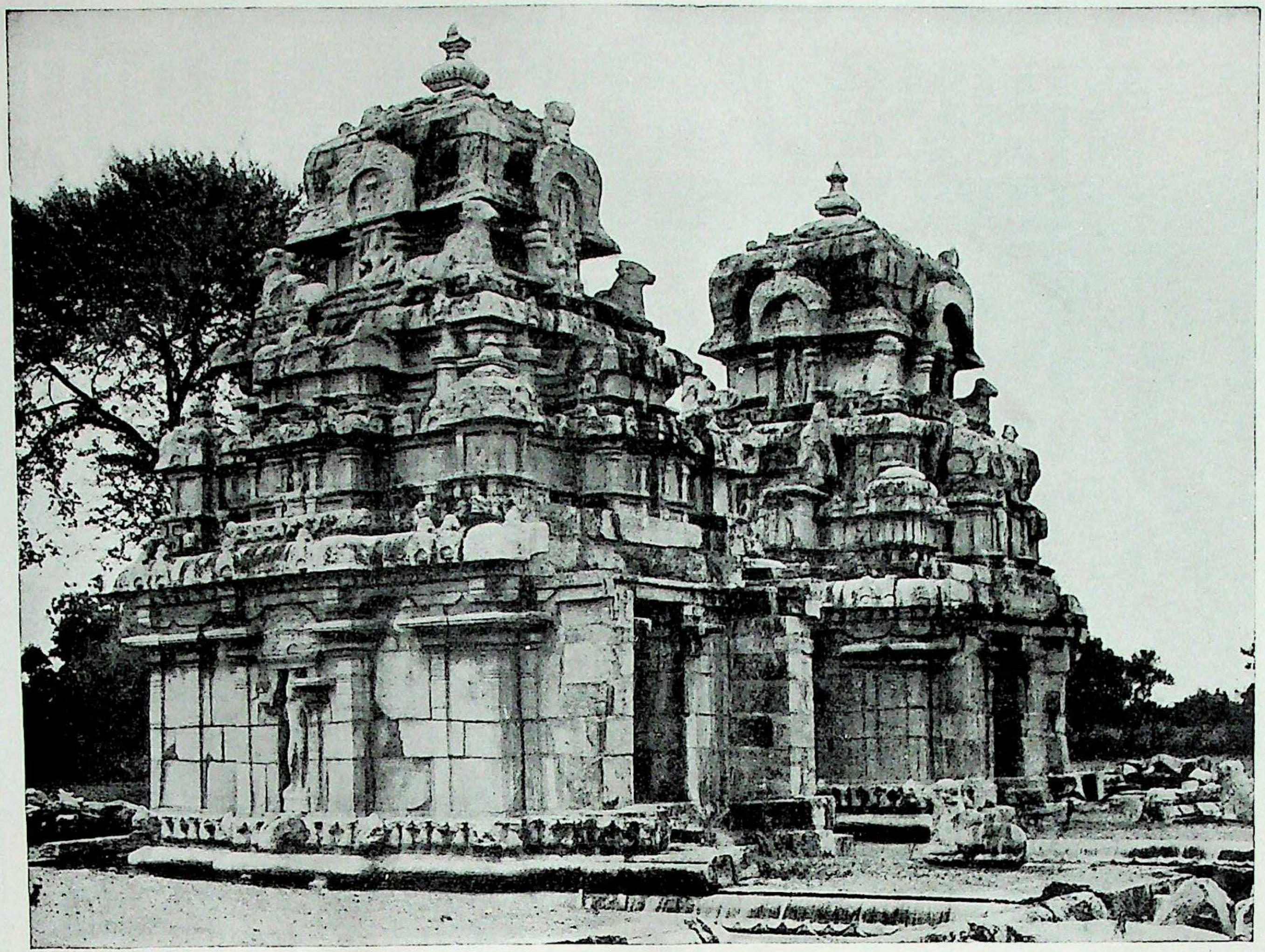

Plate 31 : Múvar Kovil at Kodumbalúr. 'The temple for three' in a row, the last showing only the remains of the basement.

fertile delta land of Tanjavúr. They had been Pallava vassals for generations and imbibed their culture. The Kodumbalúr chiefs suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Mutturaiyárs at a time when their suzerains, the Cholas were unable to come to their aid. It appears, the Irrukuvels were under the sway of the Mutturaiyárs for some time during the tenth century and that there were even inter-marriages between the two dynasties.

Perhaps a Mutturaiyár princess did enter the Irrukuvel family during this time. She might have brought with her some Pallava sculptors or the Kodumbalúr chiefs, impressed by the Pallava style might have imported them on their own. By no other means can one explain the distinct Pallava elegance of Múvar Kovil. Here one can see masterful portrayals of exquisite grace in which the sculptor has sought to capture the detached spirit of the eternal soul.

Múvar Kovil or "the temple for three" at Kodumbalúr is a beautiful group. The first impression is one of enchanting beauty, perfect composition in stone. The poise of the vimána, the beauty of the supple figures that have been modelled with loving care and the refined contours of the domical terrace edgings, all indicate the Pallava love for delicacy of structure and form. (Pl. 31).

The three shrines must once have stood in a line. The south and middle vimánas are intact but only the basement remains of the north. Excavations show that once each of these temples had an ardhamandapa and there was a mahamandapa common to all three. Around these were fifteen sub-shrines ranged along the enclosed wall and forming a temple complex that is a special feature of the early Chola. It is interesting to note that the celebrated temple at Prambanam in Java built within less than half a century of each other has the same feature. There are in fact 156 minor shrines in the Prambanam temple complex. There is no doubt that Indonesia and South India had many cultural contacts.

The plinth of each of these shrines rests on a lotus base, curved inverted double lotus. Over it run a frieze of yális. (Pl. 32). The walls themselves are not too low but the massive base gives

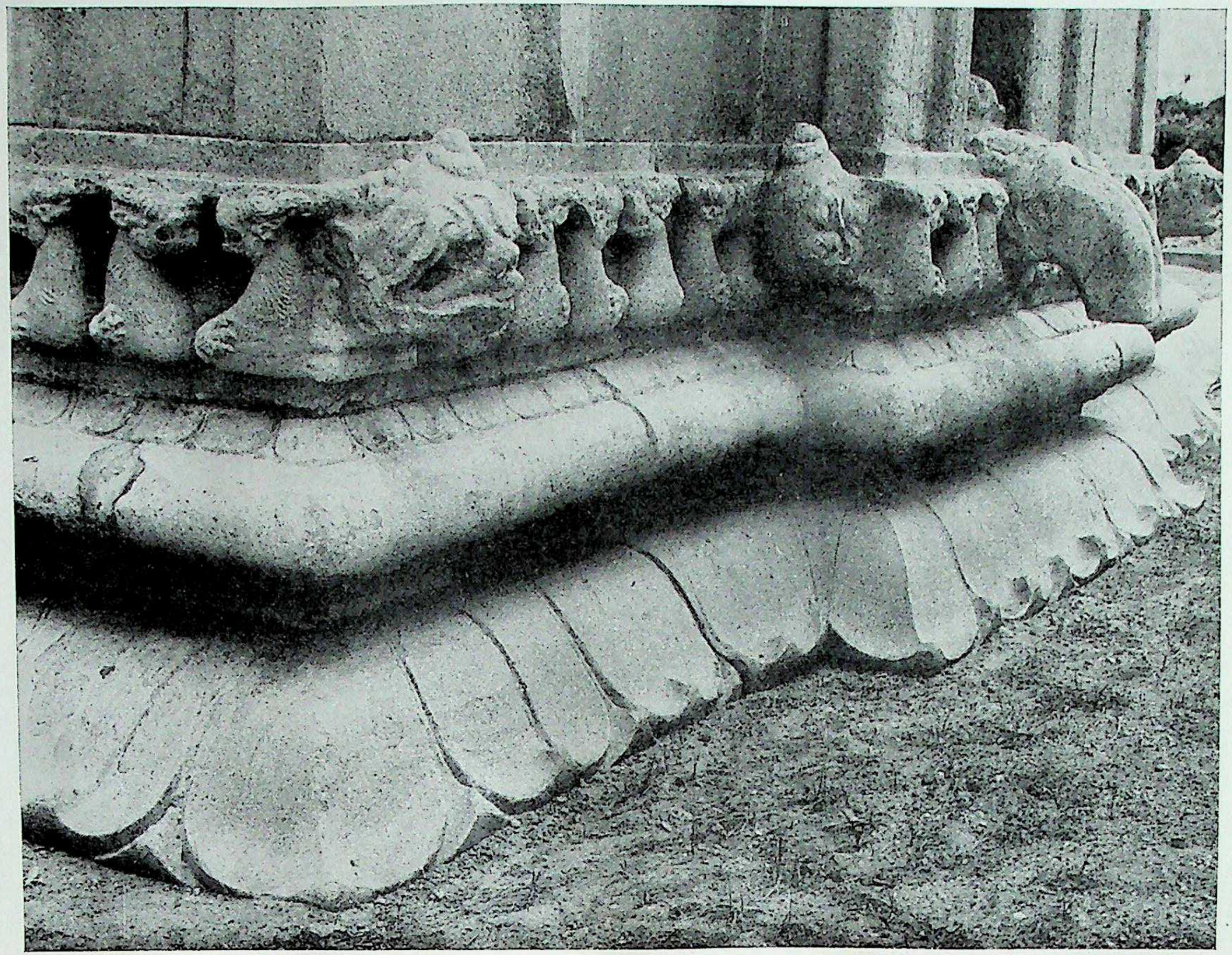

Plate 32 : Múvar Kovil. The lotus base and the line of yális.

an illusion that the vimána ascends almost from the base. The entire effect is that of an excellently proportioned miniature. The pilasters engaged in the wall are tetragonal and give the whole temple a slender effect. On top of the walls are rows of cherubic ganas playing different instruments. These impish figures, in their abandon, show the uninhibited frolics of the Siva ganas. For the rest, the diminishing vimána follows the usual Chola pattern. The edging of the lower tier has a line of domical cells with a railing of ornamental balustrade reminiscent of Buddhist railings. Each cell or tiny vimáma has a chaitya window. The central cell is rectangular and waggon-shaped. Its niche is topped with a chaitya arch worked with scrolls. So are the niches on the walls. Four beautifully moulded bulls adorn the four corners of the gríva. The terraces culminate in a square curvilinear sikhara. In style, construction and delicacy Múvar Kovil evinces the same perfection as the rathas at Mamallapuram.

There are no lingams inside these shrines but a whole lingam and fragments of two others were dug out during the excavations. Decorating the niches in the walls are some of the finest sculptures in our country made more beautiful by time which has lent them a mellow glow. The sculptor's devotion and intensity of religious fervour is reflected in the faces of these gods.

The Ardhanári and its beautiful pose of the woman made one with man is eloquent in its declaration that the male and female principles are inseparable and found together in cosmic evolution. The story is that Brahma brought into being many shining sons so that they may create countless worlds. But these sons were not interested in creation. They became absorbed in meditating the supreme. Disappointed, Brahma grew angry and frowned. From his frowning forehead was born a son as bright as the sun. The newly created being was half male and half female, the Siva-Sakti or Ardhanári that we know of.

Vinádhara, the young Siva with an enigmatic smile is an arresting figure. (Pl. 33).

And what dignity of poise, what careless elegance is revealed

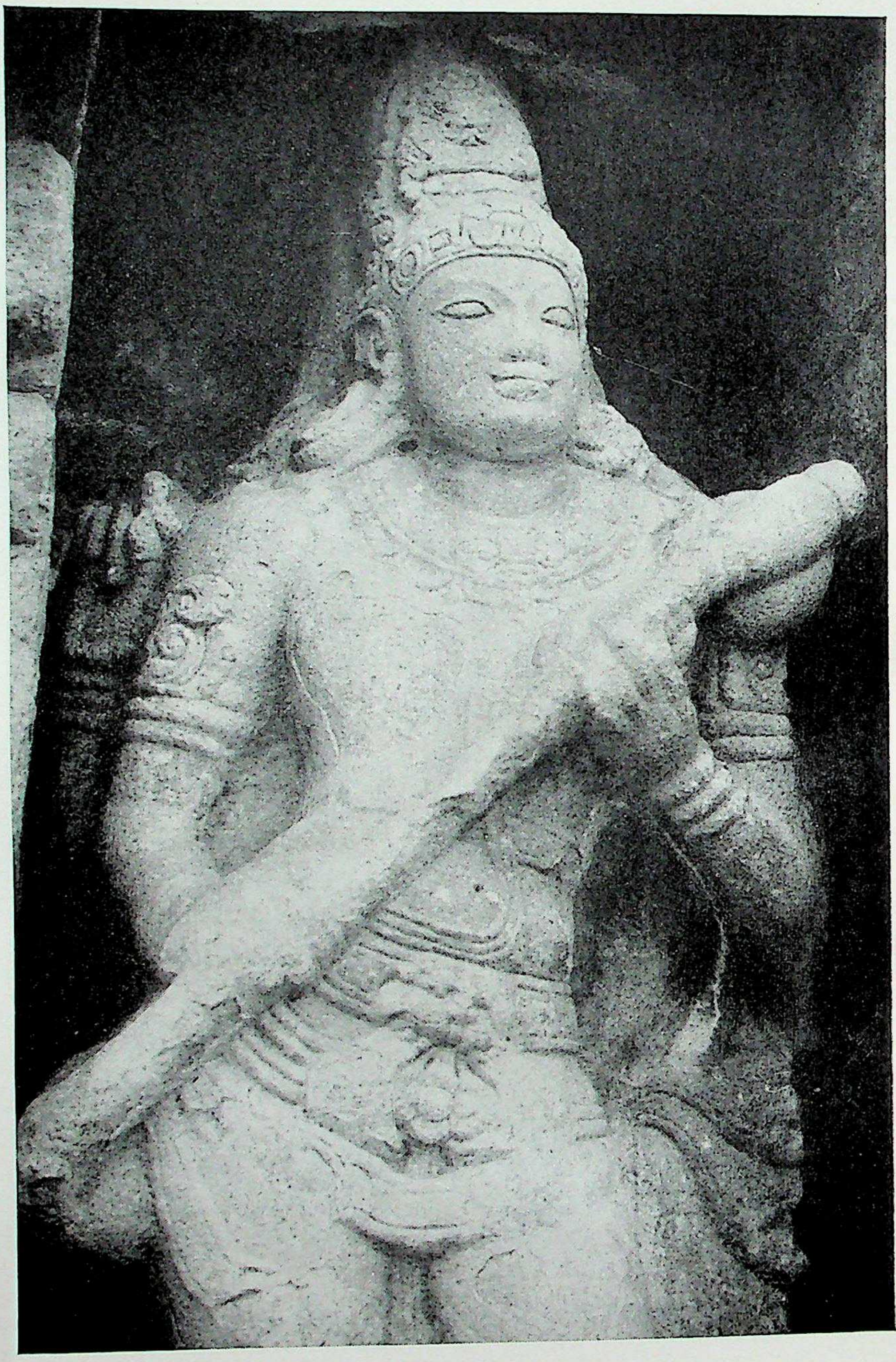

Plate 33 : Múvar Kovil. Vínádhara.

in that gesture of the bent arm when as Rishabháruda, the rider of the bull, Siva attempts to rest it on his váhana.

On one of the walls with two niches one on top of the other, Siva is shown in two of his destructive moods. One is Kálári, and the other Gaja-samhára-múrti. These figures in their refined grace show a lightness of form that is difficult to imagine in stone. The lord Kálári is arrested in a movement of the chatura pose of dancing. One feels that at any moment he may renew the dance. There is so much suppressed action in the soft moulding of the thighs and legs. The look of sublime compassion on Siva's face while dancing over Yama or Kála is superb. The fierce ecstasy portrayed on the face of the killer of the elephant, Gaja-samhára-múrti, is awe-inspiring. (Pl. 34).

On one of the walls of the south temple, a Pallava sculptor has enacted a play. In the top niche is Siva as Gangádhara (he who holds the river Gangá) in a sportive mood. His face is suffused with a tender but mischievous smile while Párvati has moved away in mock anger. The whole composition of the goddess trying to edge away by squeezing herself into the narrow space of the niche far from the inviting gaze of her lord shows great aesthetic sensibility. Below in the next niche we find the sequel. The lovers are now reconciled and Párvati's face is lighted up with happiness as she is encircled by the arm of her lord. The touch itself is light and the gesture careless. All the same a deep tremor of passion runs through the portrait. The artist here has shown an exquisite sense of restraint. A chauri bearer stands a little further away discreetly fanning the lovers from behind a ledge. Her slender elongated limbs remind one again of the Pallava sculpture at Mamallapuram. (Pl. 35).

There are some fine pieces of loose sculpture that have been unearthed. Among them is a lady at toilet bending her slender body in coy grace, a lovely head of a princess and a most striking piece of a highly coiffured prince.

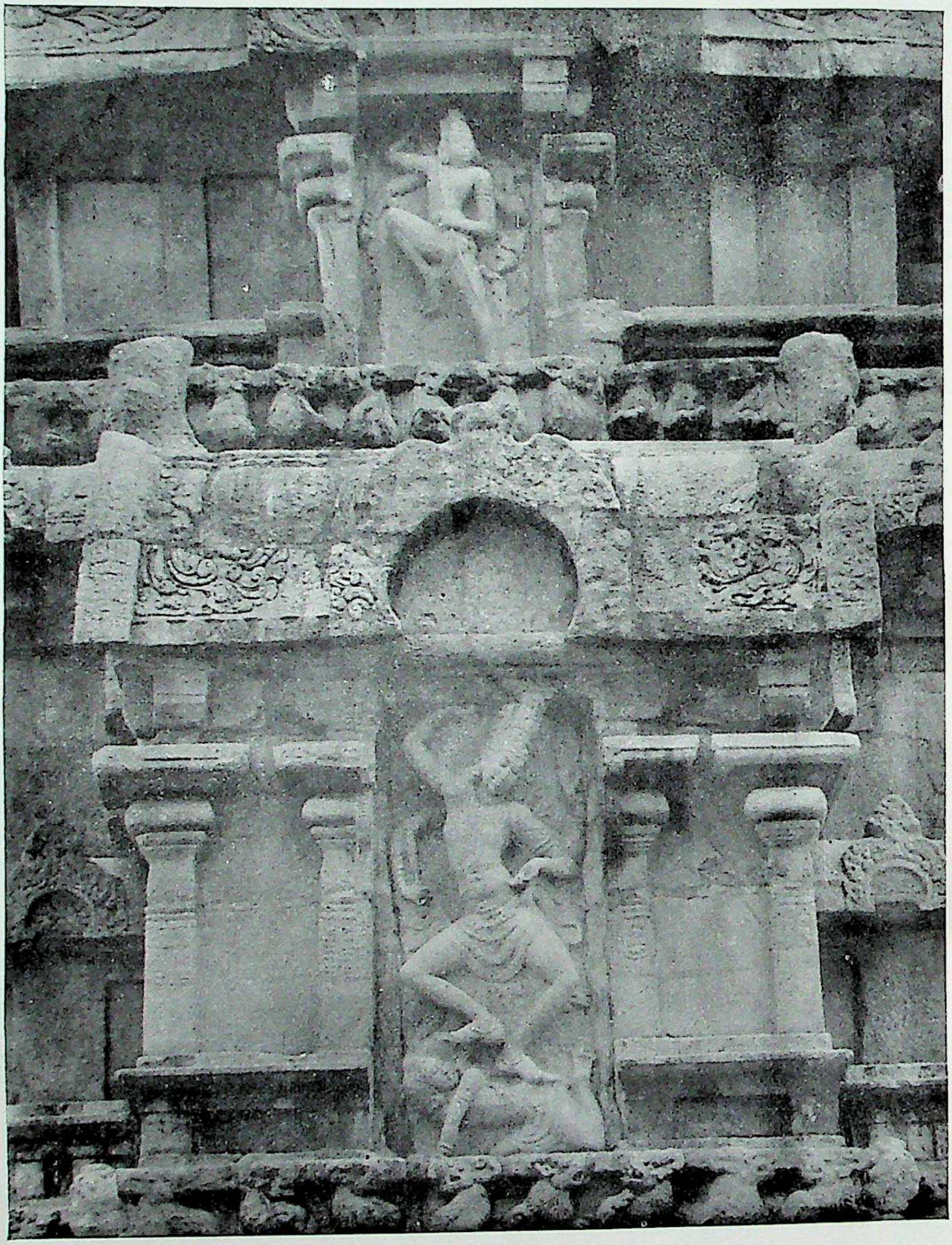

Plate 34 : Múvar Kovil. Two niches one on top of the other showing Kálári and Gaja-samhára-múrti

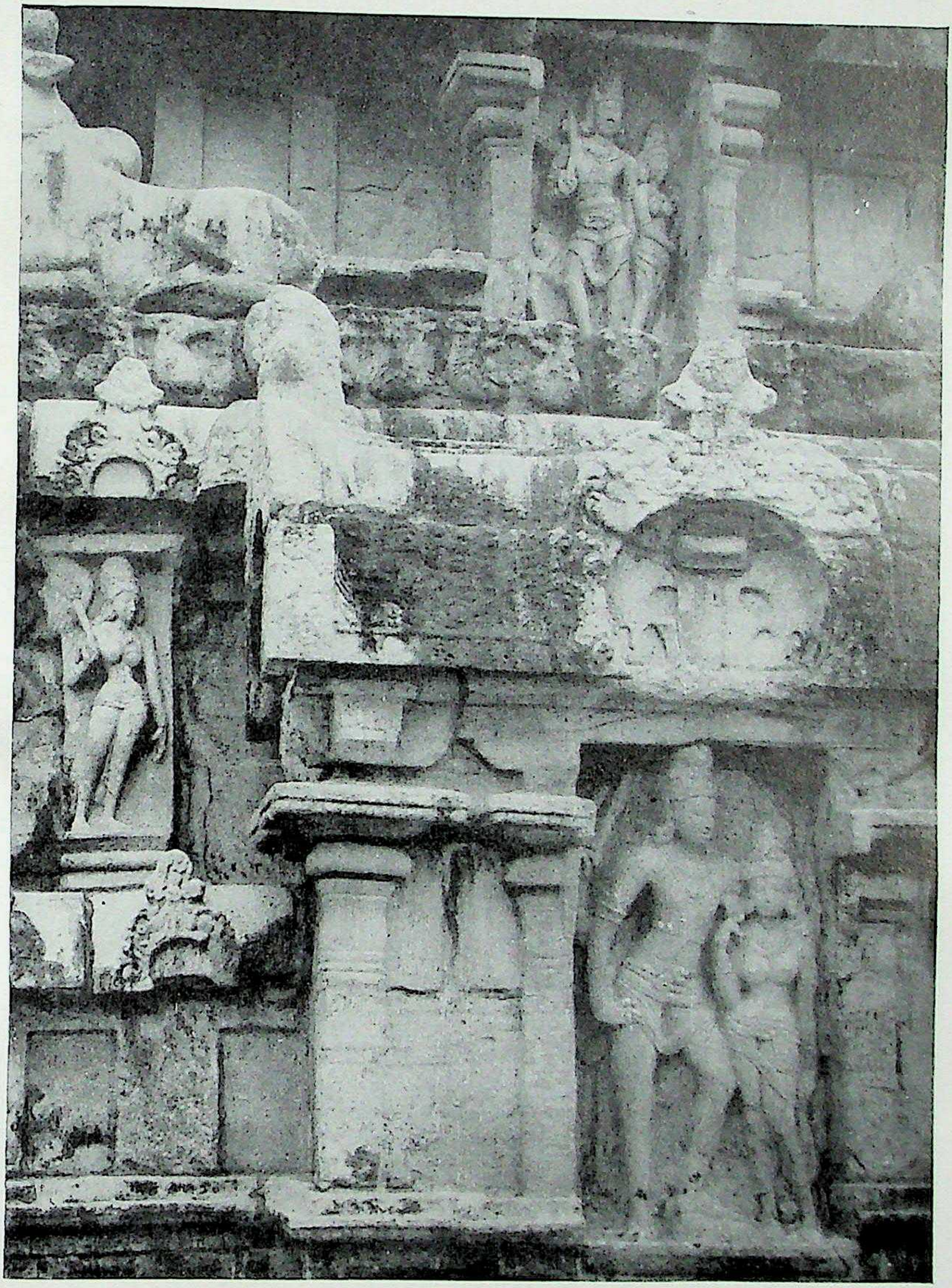

Plate 35 : The play and the sequel. Siva and Párvati with a damsel on the left bearing the chauri.

TIRUVÁLÍSVARA

The Válisvara temple at Tiruválisvaram is another that belongs to the same period. Tiruválisvaram is 30 miles from Tirunelveli on the Ambasamudram road. It dates later than Kodumbalúr but is placed just before the accession of Rájarája (985 A.D.). Rájarája's inscriptions are the earliest traced on the walls of the extant structure. The mahámandapa and the devi shrine are later additions, say thirteenth century. The main structure follows the same Chola pattern and the workmanship is spectacular. The sculptures on the upper tiers of the vimana are unsurpassed for beauty of line and form. The inversions in the wall are perfectly shaped like the petals of a lotus flower. The pilasters, corbels and roll cornice are the same except that the walls are covered with inscriptions. This gives the temple an old world air which is even more pronounced by the ethereal beauty of the ancient sculpture on the tiers. (Pl. 36). On the walls of the upper tier between two magnificent roll cornices of exquisite scroll work are statues which almost stand out clearly as in the round. (Pl. 37).

On the southern tier is Natarája in the centre with Rishabháruda and Devi on the right. Natarája the dancing Siva, is modelled with great excellence. The lifted leg is beautifully poised while the face wears the most famous enigmatic smile. Cosmic activity is the central motive of this dance of Siva. Creation arises from the drum on his right top hand, and protection from the (fear not) hand of hope. The foot aloft promises release from bondage. The other stamping on the dwarf demon denotes stability. The twirling of his knotted hair and the flying movement of the scarf give a vivid picture of mercurial motion. (Pl. 38).

Rishabháruda, the rider of the bull, is a touching tableau of the pair Siva and Párvati. Pallava idealism has here developed into Chola humanism. His tenderness and her coyness are touching.

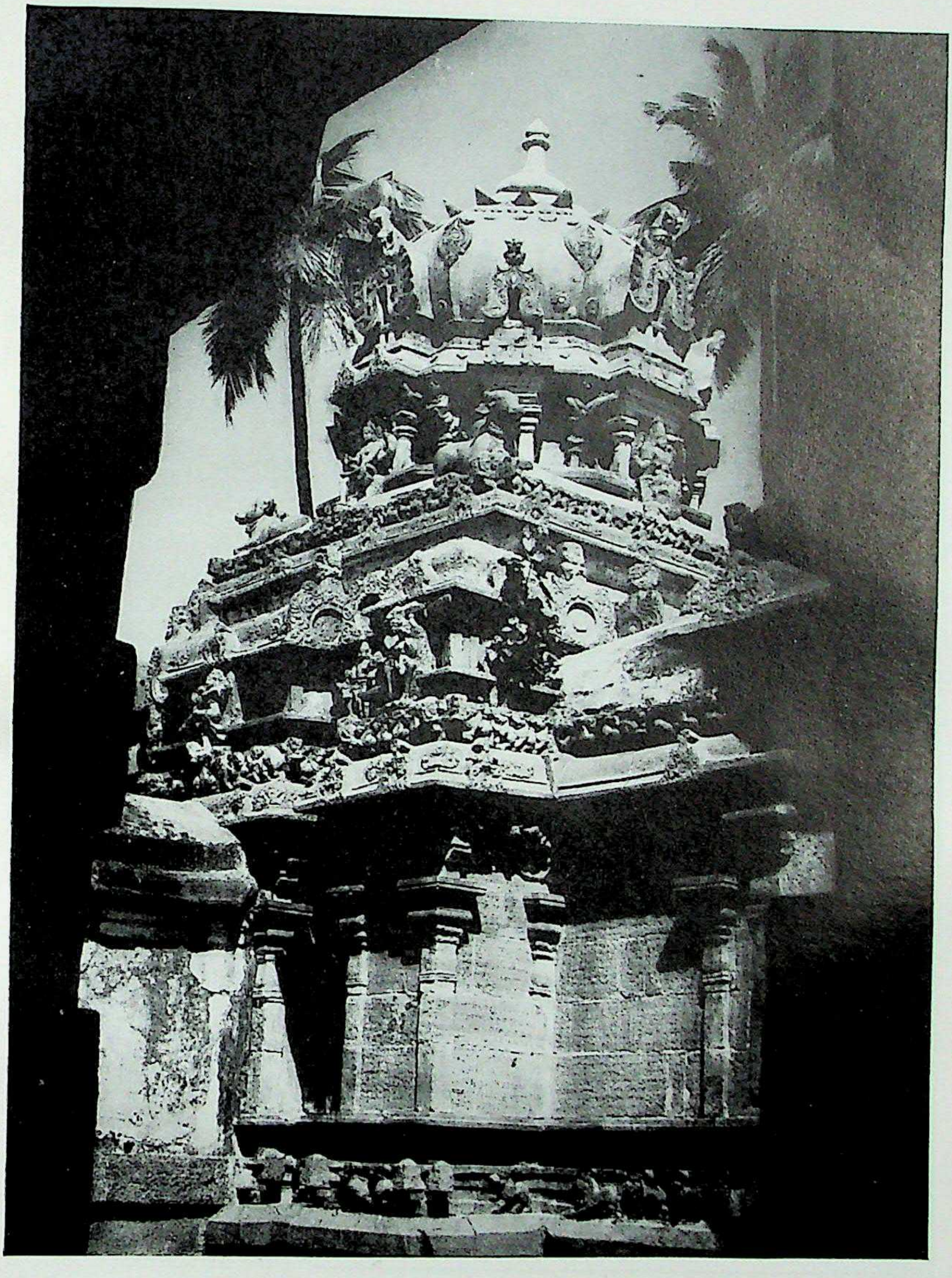

Plate 36 : Válisvara at Tiruválísvaram. View of the temple and dome with inscriptions on the wall. Note the invertions in the base shaped like the petals of a lotus flower.

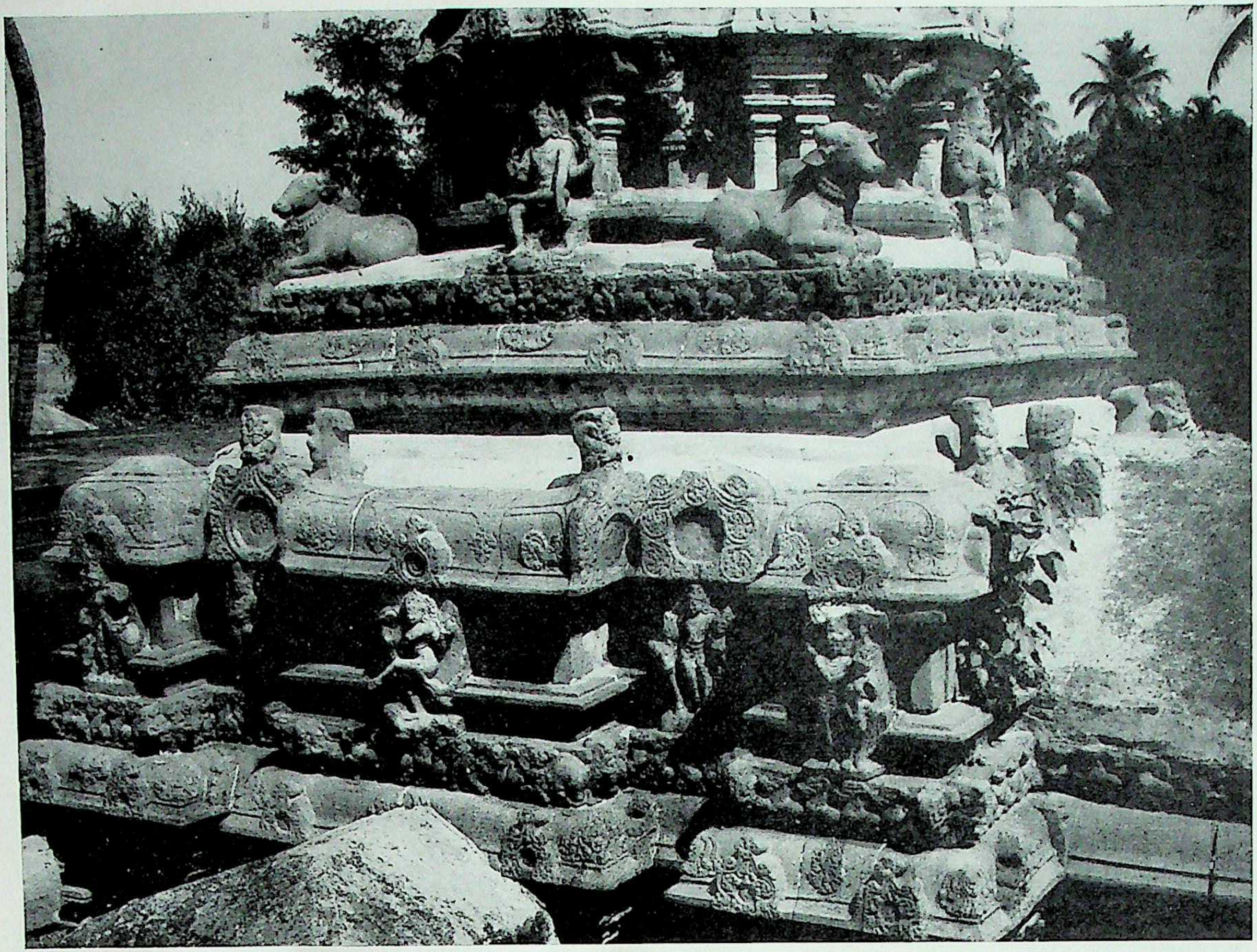

Plate 37 : Válísvara. Line of figures on the parapet of the upper tier.

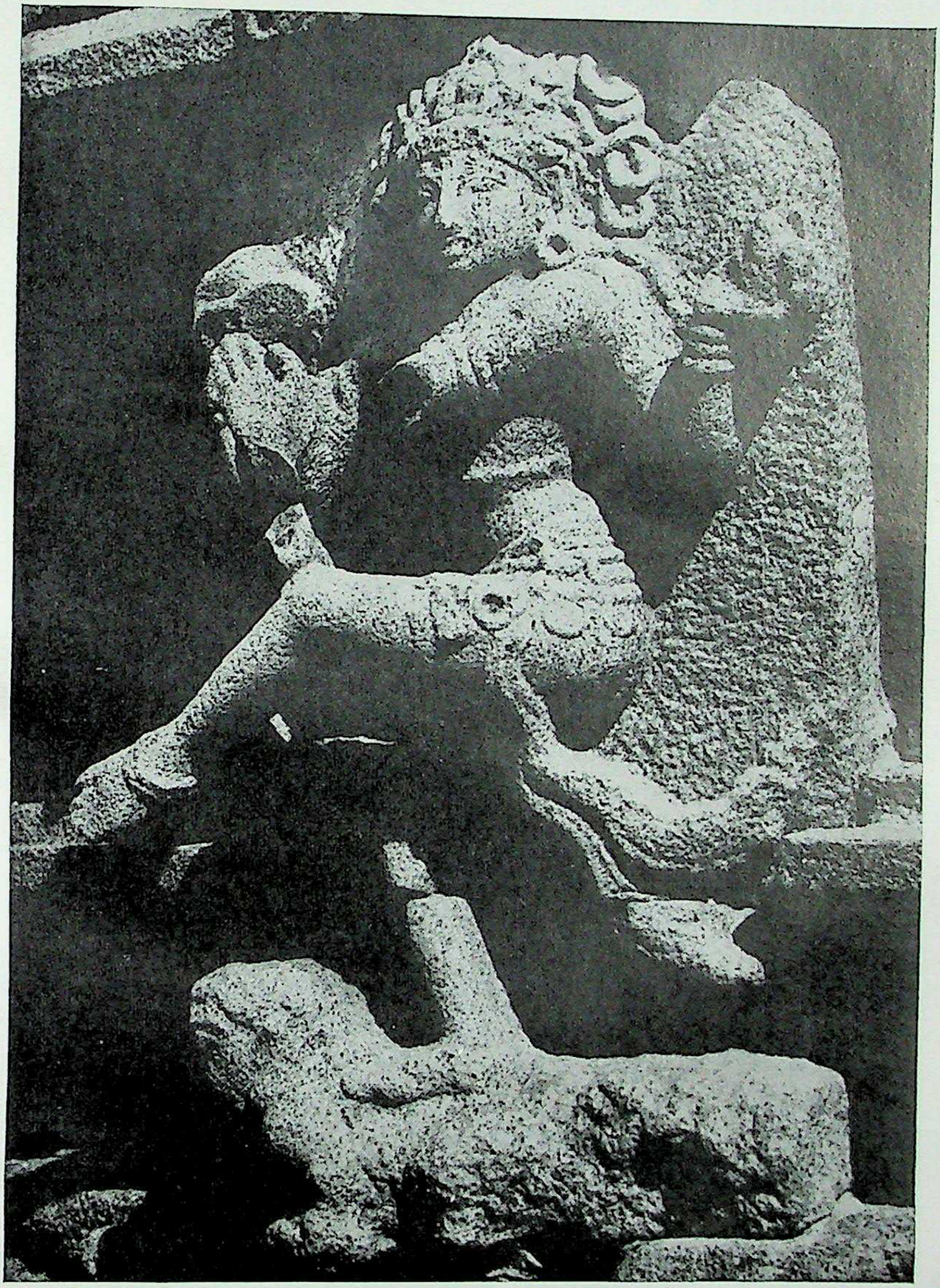

Plate 38 : Válisvara Natarája, the dancing Siva one of the figures on the upper tier.

Gangádhara (he who wears the river Gangá) is another intimate portrait of Siva-Párvati. Siva seems to be pacifying the frightened goddess who looks the very acme of womanly perfection. The face of Gangádhara reflects the lofty expression of a god who is about to perform a supreme act, that of receiving the torrential Gangá on his head. Gangá is entangled in the masses of Siva's matted hair. The Chola style depicts Gangádhara with three arms.

There is an Ardhanári with three arms, a sculpture that balances the male and the female in exquisite proportions. The narrow waist and the alluring curve of the hip make the figure most captivating. The sages and gods go round Siva and Párvati at Kailasa and worship them with joined hands. The sage Bhringi however circumambulates only Siva leaving out the goddess. This gesture wounds Párvati who appeals to Siva to remedy the insult. Siva makes her part of himself. She is his left side. Undaunted Bhringi turns himself into a leech and boring a hole through Ardhanári circumambulates only the Siva aspect of the form.

The plastic moulding of the nandis on the parapet of the gríva is peerless. The neck or the gríva and the sikhara with its cut in edging is too ornate to be of the same class as the rest.

A Dakshinámúrti of great beauty adorns one of the tiers. The expression is one of serene happiness. The Dakshinámúrti Upanishad states that he is the supreme god, who at the end of an aeon absorbs within himself the whole of the universe and remains resplendent with joy. The demon, Apasmára under him is the personification of the ignorance of human beings which he keeps under subjection under his foot. His body glows with eternal bliss, eternal energy. As a teacher, Dakshinámúrti teaches the knowledge of self, rescuing man from the bondage of illusion. He himself is imperishable, without birth or death. The face portrays calm and the eyes are fixed below.

The sub-shrines around contain some beautiful figures. There is a Kumara or Subramanya of captivating charm and a Ganesa. Of Kumara's six heads, three are visible. Although sadly mutilated, one sees why this god had such a reputation for virile charm.

Ganesa is the deity presiding over obstacles. He is the first son of Siva and Párvati. Many are the stories of the origin of this pot-bellied god who is seen gambolling with the capering imps called ganas. Once Siva and Párvati were on the slopes of the Himalyas when they saw a pair of elephants sporting in the waters of the lake. Wishing to do likewise they took the form of elephants and pleased themselves. It was then that the elephant-headed Ganesa was born to them. The grotesque figure of this god of obstacles is comic and at the same time full of import, his elephant-head denoting sagacity and wisdom. Siva made him the chief of his ganas and declared that he should be worshipped and invoked first on all occasions as the lord of obstacles. The Cholas delight in portraying him as "the dancing Ganesa".

GLOSSARY

A

Agni	The vedic god of fire, later of Indra's Heaven.
Apsaras	The celestial maidens of Indra's Heaven. They were the dancers and singers at his court.
Ardhamandapa	The vestibule that connects the inner cell with the outer hall of a temple.
Angkor	Angkor is situated 150 miles from modern Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. For hundreds of miles around Angkor are ruins of the monuments of the Khmer civilisation which flourished between the ninth and thirteenth century. Of these Angkor Vat built in the first half of the twelfth century is the supreme masterpiece. Indian merchants voyaging in these parts particularly in Chola times established close contacts with what is known as Greater India. The remains of these civilisations are therefore half Indian, half native.
Arundhati	Wife of the sage Vasishta.
Agastya	A sage said to be as small as the thumb. As compensation, he was endowed of great ascetic powers.
Asoka	The greatest of the Maurya Emperors. He adopted and spread Buddhism (B.C. 273 to 232).
Ajanta	These famous caves covering a period from pre-Christian Era right up to the seventh century A.D. are situated in the north-western part of Andhra Pradesh.
Aparájita	A Pallava king on whose side Vijayálaya Chola fought against the Pándya ruler but who was later defeated by Vijayálaya's son Áditya I.
Ardhanári	The androgynous form of Siva, as half-man, half-woman.
Áditya I	Son of Vijayálaya Chola. He ruled between 871 and 907 A.D.
Abacus	A platform or a plank over the capital of a pillar.

B

Brahman	The formless and invisible Supreme or Absolute.
Brahma	The personification of the creative aspect of the Absolute.
Balaráma	Krishna's elder brother, and a lesser incarnation of Vishnu.
Bhrigu	A sage.
Bharadwája	A sage.

Bhava	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Bhíma	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Bhárhut	This is 120 miles south-east of Allahabad. Excavations here have revealed stupas and railings belonging to the Asokan period and a little later.
Brahmacharya	The first stage in a man's life when as a student, he has to lead a life of study and continence.
Bharata Nátya	A style of dance that was evolved in that part of the Tamil country ruled by the Cholas. In recent years there has been a great revival of this form.
Bhringi	A sage.
Badámi	The capital of the Chalukyas who held Western India between the sixth and eighth centuries A.D. It is now in modern Maharáshtra.

C

Chidambaram	The mind of man as the centre of the Universe. The town, where the famous temple of Natarája is situated, is called Chidambaram.
Chakra	The discus of Vishnu, denoting the mind or the first thought of the Supreme.
Chandra	The moon god.
Cholas	The dynasty that was predominant in the south-east of India between the ninth and thirteenth centuries A.D.
Chámara	A fan made of yak's tail or of peacock feathers used as a mark of royalty or in temples.
Chauri	A fan made of yak's tail or of peacock feathers used as a mark of royalty or in temples.
Chálukyas	A dynasty who established themselves in Deccan in the middle of the sixth century A.D. and continued upto the middle of the eighth.
Chatura	A dance pose of Siva.

D

Durgá	An aspect of Párvati. She is supposed to have come out of the combined energy of Vishnu, Siva and other gods to destroy the demons. She is also known as Mahishásura-mardini, the killer of the demon Mahisha.
Dharma	The duty of right action as laid down by Hindu scriptures.
Dakshinámúrti	This is Siva in meditation, facing the south.
Dwarapála	Gate-keeper, a figure at the entrance of a temple.
Dárukávana	An area near Mayúram in modern Tanjavúr District.

E

Ellora	The rock cut caves of Ellora, full of magnificant sculpture of the Ráshtrakúta period, are situated in modern Andhra Pradesh.

G

Ganesa	The elephant-headed son of Siva and Párvati. He is the general of Siva's army of ganas. The elephant head is the symbol of sagacity. He is greatly honoured and always prayed to first as the remover of obstacles.
Ganas	The demi gods of Siva's entourage. Dwarfish and pot-bellied, they appear in sculpture as merry revellers, frolicking and full of fun.
Garuda	An eagle-like strong-beaked bird, the vehicle of Vishnu.
Gaja-samhára-múrti	Siva as the destroyer of the elephant rising out of the sacrificial fire of the rishis of Dárukávana. Gaja is elephant in Sanskrit.
Grihastya	The second stage in a man's life, that of a married householder.
Gándhára	This is a territory which corresponds roughly to modern Afghanistan and was included in the Kushán Empire.
Garbagriha	The sacred inner cell of a temple in which the deity resides.

H

Hamsa	The swan that Brahma rides.

I

Indra	In the vedas, Indra appears as the elemental god of thunder and rain. The Aryans were a simple nomadic people who sang hymns in praise of the elemental gods. As Hindu society grew more sophisticated, later teachers created a first cause, the Absolute or Brahman. Thereupon Siva, Vishnu and Brahma, the Trinity, came to be worshipped as the personifications of the different aspects of the Brahman. Indra and the other gods of the Vedas were reduced to just gods of Heaven. Indra is king of Amarávati, the abode of the gods.
Ísána	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Irrukuvels	These chieftains had their headquarters at Kodumbalúr. They were vassals of the Cholas.

J

Jamadagni	A sage and the father of Parasuráma one of the incarnations of Vishnu.
Jambúdvípa	The island continent arising out of Brahma's lotus and believed to be the ancient name for India.

K

Kumara	The six-headed son of Siva and Párvati. He is the commander-in-chief of the gods of Heaven.
Krishna	One of the two most important incarnations of Vishnu, the other being Ráma. Brought up among cowherds, he grew up into the valorous philosopher statesman of the age of the Mahábhárata. The quintessence of Hindu philosophy and way of life in its most catholic and intellectual aspect is expressed in the Bhagavad-gíta. This is in the form of a discourse by Krishna to Arjuna, a hero of the Mahábhárata war on the eve of the battle which destroyed both sides.
Kalki	He is the last of the ten most important incarnations of Vishnu.
Kubera	The god of wealth. His abode, Alakápuri is believed to be fabulously rich with golden palaces and streets paved with precious stones.
Karráli	The earliest Chola temples were all of stone, a style known as Karráli.
Kalasam	The round pot-like part of the pillar.
Kárli	A western India Buddhist cave of the Sátaváhana Andhra period (early Christian Era).
Kanishka	The most powerful of the Kushán kings who ruled upper India between the first and second centuries A.D.
Krishna II	The Ráshtrakúta king who was the contemporary of the Chola Parantaka I in the early part of his reign.
Krishna III	The Ráshtrakúta king who defeated Parántaka I of the Cholas at Takkolam in 949 A.D.
Kalári	He who stamps down Kála-death, i.e., Siva.
Kilaiyúr	Thirty miles from Tiruchirápalli on the Ariyalúr road.
Kumbakonam	Twentyfive miles north-east of Tanjavúr.
Kannanúr	Seventeen miles south of Pudukkottai.
Kánchi	The modern Kánchipuram, forty miles south-east of Madras.
Kumbham	The capital of a pillar.
Kodumbalúr	Twentyseven miles west of Pudukkottai.

L

Lingam	The common phallic form in which Siva is worshipped. It is the symbol of the male creative energy.
Lakshmi	The consort of Vishnu, the mother earth and giver of wealth and happiness.
Lingodbhava	The figure of Siva emerging from the lingam.
Lalita	An amorous dance pose.

M

Milky Ocean	The vast boundless expanse of darkness before creation wherein Vishnu reclined in meditative slumber.
Mahisha	The buffalo-faced demon that Durgá kills in battle.
Mandapa	The pillared outer hall of a temple.
Mahádeva	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Manus	The first kings of the earth created by Brahma.
Maurya	The Maurya dynasty ruled Upper India between 325 to 185 B.C.
Mamallapuram	Fifty miles south of Madras is an ancient Pallava city of glory. Half submerged beneath the sea, the area is strewn with caves and temples of marvellous execution (about sixth century A.D.).
Mutturaiyárs	These chieftains were Pallava vassals with headquarters at Tanjavúr.

N

Natarája	Siva, in his aspect as the lord of dance. He dances in the heart of man—Chidambaram.
Navagriha	The nine planets, sculptured in a block and worshipped in most temples in South India.
Nandi	The name of Siva’s váhana or vehicle, a bull.
Nárada	A sage singularly versed in music.
Náyanárs	Tamil saivite saints.
Nárttamalai	A group of hills ten miles north of Pudukkottai of which Melamalai is one.

P

Párvati	The consort of Siva, the ideal Hindu woman. In her other aspects she is known as Sakti, Durgá and Kálí.
Parasuráma	He who holds the axe. Son of the sage Jamadagni, he is an incarnation of Vishnu.
Palagai	This is the slab or plank over the pillar or pilaster.
Pasupati	The lord of animals, one of the names by which Siva is known.
Pallavas	A dynasty who dominated south-east India between the sixth and ninth centuries A.D.
Pándyas	A dynasty who came into power in south-east India after the thirteenth century and remained so until the fifteenth century A.D.
Purusha	The primeval Man of the Vedas.

Prajápatis	Sub-creators created by Brahma.
Palluvettaraiyárs	Local chieftains who owed allegiance to the Vijayálaya Cholas.
Parántaka I	The Chola king, builder of temples, who reigned from 907 to 955 A.D.
Pattadakkal	A place full of Chálukyan temples near modern Badámi.
Pullamangai	Seven miles from Tanjavúr near Pasupatikovil on the Kumbakonam road.
Pudukkottai	Sixty miles south of Tanjavúr.

R

Ráma	Prince of Ayodhya, a scion of the Ishváku dynasty, Ráma is the famous hero of the epic, Rámáyana. He is an incarnation of Vishnu.
Rig Veda	The first of the four Vedas, the earliest hymns of the Aryan religion.
Rta	The path of right or the vedic law of order.
Rudra	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Rishabháruda	Rishabha is bull in Sanskrit. He who rides the bull, i.e., Siva.
Ráshtrakútas	A dynasty who ruled in Western India between the eighth and tenth centuries A.D.

S

Siva	The personification of the destructive aspect of the Absolute.
Sakti	One of the aspects of Párvati. Literally it means power in Sanskrit.
Subramanya	Also known as Kumara or Kartikeya, the son of Siva and Párvati. Is best known as Subramanya in the south.
Sarasvati	The consort of Brahma. She symbolises learning and the fine arts.
Soma	The moon-god ; also known as Chandra.
Súrya	The sun-god, also known as Savitr.
Stúpa	Stúpas are mounds built over the relics of Buddhist saints.
Sikhara	The round top or dome over the tower of a temple.
Stúpi	The finial or the top most part of the tower of a temple.
Sástra	Science—precepts laid down in the Hindu codes.
Sangam literature	Old Tamil literature belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era.
Sanaka	A sage.
Sarva	One of the names by which Siva is known.

Sánchi	A dozen miles from modern Bhilsa near Bhopal, on a group of hills, are scattered the remains of great stupas and gateways. A number of them were constructed in the reign of the Emperor Asoka. Later the Sátaváhana Andhras, the Kshatrapa kings and others enriched and embellished the monuments to a great extent. The work seems to have gone on for centuries.
Sátaváhana Andhras	A dynasty that reigned in the Deccan during the first three centuries of the Christian era.
Sanyása	At this last stage in the development of a Hindu's life a man is ready to renounce the world.
Saivite	A devotee of Siva.
Sambandar	A Tamil saivite saint and poet.
Srínivásanallúr	This is five miles from Musiri. (Tiruchirápalli District)

T

Tripura-sundari	Durgá, the most beautiful maiden of the three worlds, (literally towns).
Tripurántaka	The destroyer of the three 'towns', the earth, the middle space, and the sky. Siva puts an end (Antaka—destroyer) to the three towns by aiming a stupendous arrow from a gigantic bow.
Takkolam	A place near modern Arkonam where a decisive battle took place between the Chola king Parántaka I and the Ráshtrakúta king Krishna III.
Tiruválísvaram	A place thirty miles from Tirunelveli on the Ambasamudram road.
Tándava	A dance of Siva.

U

Ugra	One of the names by which Siva is known.
Uraiyúr	Situated near modern Tiruchirápalli, this was the Chola capital.

V

Vedas	The earliest Hindu scripture accepted by believers as true revelation. The Vedas are really experiences of reality of the early Aryan sages in the form of hymns. Deep feeling for nature pervades the religion of the Vedas and the hymns are in praise of the elemental gods.
Vishnu	The personification of the Absolute in its aspect as the preserver or saviour.
Varuna	The Vedic elemental god of the waters. Later he is just a god of Indra's Heaven.
Váhana	The váhana or vehicle of each god represents the mood and character of that particular deity.

Vimána	The tower over the main cell of a Hindu temple.
Vánaprastha	This is the third stage in a man's life when he retires and lives a life of contemplation.
Vínádhara	He who holds the lute i.e. Siva.
Vismaya	The look of surprise.
Vijayálaya	The Chola king who reigned from 850 to 907 A.D.
Vaishnavite	A devotee of Vishnu.
Vyása	A sage, reputed to be the author of the Mahábhárata.

Y

Yogi	One who is in yoga. Yoga is the practice of meditation or inner discipline which leads to the attainment of detachment and later to the liberation of the soul. The joy within that one finds in unattached peace is supreme.
Yama	The god of death, depicted as bright and luminous.
Yális	Peculiar gargoyle-like twisted animal shapes sculptured in rows, in Chola temples.
Yogásana	A posture for yoga or meditation.

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By the same author

Tamil

Puhai Naduvil	Novel
Manathile Oru Maru	Plays
Satyameva	Novel
Pon Koondu	Novel
Vasaveswaram	Novel
Dharmakshetre	Novel
Kutti Patti Kathaigal	Folk tales

English

Children's Ramayana	for	children	(seven to ten)
Ramayana (German)	,,	,,	(seven to ten)
The Story of Rama	,,	,,	(ten to fourteen)
Sons of Pandu	,,	,,	(ten to fourteen)
The Nectar of the Gods	,,	,,	(ten to fourteen)
The Finger on the Lute	,,	,,	(fourteen to seventeen)
The Cowherd Prince	,,	,,	(ten to fourteen)